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No progress on Abu Ghneim

PALESTINIANS remained pessimistic about the prospects of peace negotiations with Israel, despite a week of shuttle diplomacy by Special US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross. Negotiations have stalled since Israel broke ground for a new Jewish settlement in Jebel Abu Ghneim in Arab East Jerusalem on 18 March, which Palestinians consider an attempt to preempt final status negotiations on the future of the holy city.

Ross met yesterday with top PLO negotiator *Saeb* Ereikat in the West Bank town of Jericho, ahead of a projected three-way meeting with Israeli representatives later in the day at the Tel Aviv residence of US Ambassador Martin Indyk.

Ereikat told Reuters before his meeting with Ross: "As far as we are concerned, there was one item on the agenda [last night], that Israel must stop all settlement activities, including Jebel Abu Ghneim."

Dennis Ross has been in the region since 7 May, trying to arrange a meeting of the two sides to break the deadlock in the peace talks. *(see p.4)*

War of nerves

THE ALLIANCE of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) headed by Laurent Désiré Kabila is waging severe psychological warfare against the regime of ailing Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seku. The ADFL's plan is to create despondency and unrest in the Zairean capital of Kinshasa in the hope that the city of five million will fall without bloodshed.

Yesterday, the ADFL announced that its troops had *reached the outskirts of* Kinshasa, but the ADFL's claims could not be independently confirmed. Kabila has been trying to keep Mobutu's troops off balance by saying in one breath that the ADFL will not attack Kinshasa and in the next that Kabila's forces will enter the capital in a matter of hours. *(see p.5)*

Turkey attack

SEVERAL thousand Turkish troops, backed by tanks and heavy artillery, pushed across the border into northern Iraq at dawn yesterday. This offensive operation was aimed at helping Kurdish Democratic Party rebels in their fight against the Turkish-Kurdish rebels, the PKK, a Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman said in a report carried by The AP and Reuters.

Quake aid

INTERNATIONAL aid to survivors of a deadly earthquake that left 50,000 homeless in the Khorasan region of eastern Iran last Saturday started trickling in yesterday. Meanwhile, Iranian rescue workers ended their operations in 200 villages devastated by the earthquake that measured 7.1 on the Richter scale.

Iranian officials revised the casualty figures downwards, setting the latest figures at 1,560 dead and 2,810 injured. Earlier official reports had put the casualty figures at 2,400 dead and 6,000 injured and estimated material damage at $200 million.

INSIDE

Tying economic knots

President Mubarak is in Morocco for talks with King Hassan, focussing on cementing bilateral relations and salvaging the stalled peace process. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Rabat

In what was described as the first step towards the establishment of a common Arab market, President Hosni Mubarak and Morocco's King Hassan yesterday co-chaired the first meeting of a joint committee charged with promoting bilateral economic cooperation.

The two chief executives also discussed ways of breaking the deadlock in the Middle East peace process, which stalled after Israel decided to build a Jewish quarter in Arab East Jerusalem in March. Hassan is head of the Jerusalem Committee of the *Organisation of the Islamic Conference* (OIC).

"The Arab and Islamic worlds have strong ties to Jerusalem and nobody can compromise Arab-Islamic rights in the holy city," Mubarak told reporters aboard the plane to Rabat. "It would be a gross error if anyone assumed that the Palestinians would agree to the construction of the Abu Ghneim settlement in Jerusalem."

Mubarak said a resumption of the peace negotiations would be "difficult" unless Israel took a clear stand to reverse its expansionist policy. He disclosed that Egypt had refused to take part in a joint meeting with the Palestinians, Israel and the United *States because of the "ambiguous nature of* the Israeli position." But he denied that the Egyptian-American relationship had cooled as a result of the deadlock, declaring that relations were "at their best."

Mubarak and Hassan, or their representatives, were expected to sign as many as 18 agreements, protocols and memoranda of understanding, which should give a major boost to Egyptian-Moroccan economic cooperation. They include agreements for the protection of investments, the establishment of a free trade zone and a shipping line to link the two countries.

"This could be a good start for the establishment of a common Arab market," *Mubarak said. "Serious and persistent ef*forts should be exerted to make this market a reality because it would serve the interests of all Arabs."

It was unfortunate, he added, that 92 per cent of Arab trade was with non-Arab countries, while inter-Arab trade accounted for a paltry eight per cent in total.

"The establishment of a common Arab market will mean prosperity and progress, the creation of new job opportunities and the establishment of mega economic projects," continued Mubarak, adding that while there might be problems at the outset, any obstacles would eventually be surmounted.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa described the meeting of the Egyptian-Moroccan committee as an "important political step for cementing bilateral relations in all spheres. This is not a mere technical gathering for the signing of agreements; it gives *bilateral relations a strategic political* dimension."

Sayed Abu Zeid, the foreign minister's assistant for Arab affairs, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Mubarak-Hassan summit had come "at a time of crisis for the peace process. It presents an opportunity for the two leaders to exchange views on the situation." He noted Mubarak's "pivotal role" in the peace process, and Hassan's "distinguished standing in the Arab world."

During Mubarak's visit to Morocco in March, the two leaders decided to co-chair meetings of the nine-year-old joint committee in order to increase its weight and influence. It is the first inter-Arab bilateral *committee to be headed by heads of state.*

The Egyptian ambassador in Morocco, Adel El-Gazzar, told the *Weekly* that studies of a free trade agreement have been made "and all that remains is an executive decision for its launch."

"We want a realistic and beneficial agreement on free trade," commented Zoubair Hakam, economic counsellor at the Moroccan Embassy in Cairo. He also attached great importance to the agreement on the protection of investments, declaring that Morocco is giving priority to bilateral economic cooperation.

El-Gazzar described Egyptian-Moroccan political relations as "excellent... Morocco *is a principal player in the Arab arena;* therefore, it is important to focus on the further promotion of bilateral relations."

A preparatory meeting in Rabat, grouping trade representatives, experts and officials from both sides, worked for a week ahead of the Mubarak-Hassan summit to finalise the documents before the president's arrival. *(see "Insisting on a fair deal", p.2)*



HOMAGE TO A PIONEER: In commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Mahmoud Said (1897-1964), the Supreme Council of Culture (SCC) is holding a two-day seminar on the man and his art (19-20 May). Hosted by Kamel Zoheiri, director of the Greater Cairo Library, the proceedings will be opened by Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni and SCC Secretary-General Gaber Asfour. Concurrently, a commemorative exhibition of Said's work is to be opened on 19 May at the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art.

Mahmoud Said was born on 8 April 1897 in Alexandria's Anfoushi quarter to a well-to-do family. His early tuition in art was received at the hands of a number of Italian artists then teaching in Alexandria, and in 1920 he spent a year in Paris where he studied at the Académie Julien.

Although he produced landscapes and still-lifes, it is primarily as a portraitist that Said is celebrated. Whether his sitters were from his aristocratic entourage or models from the more popular quarters of Alexandria, Said was exceptionally skilled at capturing expression, mannerisms and personality. Universal favourites include his portraits of folkloric figures and his many studies of women in their coquettish *milaya* wraps. Widely travelled, Said exhibited his work in New York, Paris and at the Venice Biennale. In 1951 he received the Légion d'Honneur and in 1960 President Nasser awarded him the State Merit Award. Said died on 8 April 1964, on his birthday.

Above: Said's *"Zhat Al-Uyoon Al-Assaliya"* (She of the honey-coloured eyes), part of Al-Ahram's collection of paintings.

Chahine hits Cannes

Today, *Al-Massir*, the first Egyptian film in years to be entered in competition at Cannes, will be screened. **Hani Mustafa** assesses its chances

Youssef Chahine's *Al-Massir* (Destiny), which is today screened in official competition at Cannes, marks a new phase in the on-going battle that has constituted the director's career. The impetus behind Chahine's writing and directing *Al-Massir* appears to have been a reaction against the furore provoked by his previous film *Al-Muhagir* (The Immigrant), the subject of a long running legal battle between the director and his fundamentalist opponents who sought to have the film banned on religious grounds.

In *Al-Massir* Chahine attempts from the beginning *to provide a contemporary re*-reading of the era of Ibn Rushd, showing how fundamentalism and book-burning are not restricted to a particular place or religion but are born of an ignorance that *can blossom* at any time and in any place. The opening scene of the film is set in France, where the Inquisition presides over the burning of Ibn Rushd's books, together with the Frenchman with whom the copies had been found. Meanwhile, the man's son, after witnessing the bonfire, decides to travel to Andalusia in search of Ibn Rushd (Nur El-Sherif).

Ibn Rushd's lifetime — during which Andalusia witnessed the rise of a fundamentalist trend that capitalised on the difficulties which its ruler, Al-Mansur (Mahmoud Hemeida), faced against the Spanish — provides a convenient allegory for contemporary Egypt.

"*Al-Massir* emblemises the ferocious conflict between two religious trends, one espousing insularity, content with outdated religious exegesis and offering lip-service to the sultan; the other forward-looking and aspiring to a better life for humanity. And it is these two trends that continue to dictate Arab and Islamic reality," comments Ali Abu Shadi, head of the censorship bureau and a noted film critic.

While *Al-Massir* is exacting in its recreation of past times — both sets and costumes are historically accurate — Chahine deliberately inserts signs linking past with present and underlining the parallels between fundamentalism then and now. And such links are made more accessible by the fact that colloquial Arabic rather than the classical idiom is used for dialogue, emphasising the contemporary relevance of the problems dealt with in the film.

Regardless of the content of his film, Chahine's participation in Cannes itself constitutes a blow for extremist forces in *Egypt since Al-Massir's screening within* the main competition can only invigorate the Egyptian film industry at a time when regressive forces were preparing to celebrate its demise. Such international recognition is likely to boost resistance on the part of Egyptian directors to the strictures which Islamists have attempted to impose.

The screening of Chahine's film at Cannes should also help deconstruct stereotypical notions about the Arab world since central to its plot is the message that, if the Arabs have for several centuries been learning from Western civilisation, then Western civilisation is also very much indebted to Arab thought. When the Inquisition swept through Europe, dragging it back to the Dark Ages, Ibn Rushd's writings nevertheless managed to survive and later contribute to the intellectual development of Europe. In short, *Al-Massir* serves as an eloquent riposte to xenophobic claims that European civilisation owes nothing to Arab culture.

Strangely, it was by chance that Chahine's film was included in the main competition. *Initially selected to be screened* outside competition, it was only when the Chinese authorities banned director Zhang Yimou from screening his latest film, *Keep Cool*, at the festival, and the Iranian authorities likewise protested against Abbas Kiarostami's *The Delicious Taste of Cherries* from being shown, that room was found for *Al-Massir*. The Chinese decision has been widely interpreted as a result of annoyance in Beijing that festival organisers had decided to screen Zhang Yuan's *East Palace, West Palace* — which the Chinese government believes portrays the country *in a bad light* — while the decision of the Iranian authorities — later revoked — appeared to be an attempt to punish Abbas Kiarostami for refusing to allow his film to be premiered at *Tehran's Fajr* Festival.

The official competition at Cannes this year promises to be tough, and Chahine will be battling it out with directors like Francesco Rosi, Marco Bellochio and Wim Wenders, who in 1984 was awarded the palme d'or for *Paris-Texas* and in 1988 voted best director for *Heaven Above Berlin*. Matthieu Kasovitz, who two years ago was voted best director for the film *La haine*, is also competing, as is the Cairo-born but now Canadian citizen Atom Egoyan, who in 1994 won the Special Jury Award for his film *Exotica*.

Al-Massir is the first Egyptian film for many years to be screened in competition at Cannes, and the Egyptian film world is likely to be on tenterhooks until the jury's decision is announced. Festival goers in Cannes, however, are no strangers to the Arab world's most important film industry. The first Egyptian entry at Cannes was in 1946, the first time the festival was held, when Mohamed Karim's *Donia* was shown in competition and the Egyptian actor Youssef Wahbi was a member of the jury. Nor is Chahine himself new to the event. His films *Ibn Al-Nil* (Son of the Nile), *Al-Ard* (The Land) and *Adieu Bonaparte* have all been screened at previous festivals.

Insisting on a fair deal

Egyptian diplomacy pressed ahead throughout the week with its efforts to secure a fair deal for the Palestinians in the stalled negotiations with Israel. Dina Ezzat reports

Egypt launched yet another intensive round of diplomacy this week in an effort to salvage the peace process. Senior Egyptian officials were busy throughout the week with successive meetings, examining options and proposals to secure for the Palestinians a comfortable negotiating position that would save them from having to make further concessions to Israel.

President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa met with the Jordanian foreign minister, the US envoy to the Middle East, the head of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Norwegian foreign minister.

Palestinian officials, officials from some Gulf states, and Western diplomats were also visiting Cairo for consultations.

"Now we are not talking about giving a push or supporting the peace process. We are talking about salvaging the peace process," Moussa said.

All the visiting officials confirmed that the situation was very critical, and there was a general consensus that it is the expansionist policy of the Israeli government that has brought the peace process to a standstill.

Even Bjoren Tore Godal, the Norwegian foreign minister, whose country was the architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords but abstained from voting in favour of a UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Israeli settlement policy, shared the same view. The building of settlements, he said, "contradicted the spirit of Oslo".

But nobody seemed to have an exact idea of how to persuade Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to reverse this policy. On the one hand, the Arabs seem to lack the required political clout to get the US to push the Israelis to stop building in East Jerusalem. And on the other hand, the other key Western players are opposed to the idea of putting pressure on Israel.

"To be perfectly honest, it is a very complicated situation," said one informed diplomat, who asked that his name be withheld. He explained, "It is very clear that the US envoy to the region [Dennis Ross] arrived to serve the interests of the Israelis and to show that it is the US, and not Europe, nor Egypt for that matter, that is brokering peace in the region".

Moreover, Ross has been working all along to persuade the Palestinians to sit together with the Israelis regardless of the ongoing construction work in East Jerusalem. According to informed diplomats, this meant that the Palestinians would have to give more than what they could reasonably afford in terms of security cooperation.

"The main problem is that this [Ross'] call was getting a positive response from certain Arab factions," the diplomat explained. According to the diplomat, the Palestinians — lacking any other hope — wanted to go ahead with it, the Jordanians supported them, and the Moroccans also approved the idea. "The US wants to pursue Camp David-style negotiations that would run parallel to the Oslo negotiations; the Palestinians are not completely opposed to the idea but it is Cairo and Damascus who are keeping the Palestinians from going ahead," said another source.

Egyptian officials argued that they had an important role to play in supporting the Palestinians. According to one diplomat, "Egyptian officials' contacts are aimed at opening some closed doors and keeping some other doors closed".

Meanwhile, some Palestinian observers argued that, given Netanyahu's political intransigence, the Palestinians were bound to sustain a political loss over and above the economic loss resulting from the stalled momentum of the peace process.

"Cairo is not giving the Palestinians more than verbal support, but it is the Palestinians living under occupation who have to foot the bill," said one Palestinian.

Moussa responded, "The Palestinians are not minors. They are doing what they think is best for them."

On Monday night Ross declared that the Israelis and Palestinians had agreed to sit down and talk about the problems they are facing. But the Palestinians were quick to stress that the meeting does not mean there will be a return to the negotiating table before a full halt of settlement activities in East Jerusalem.

Cairo reacted cautiously. Moussa discussed the matter in a long-distance telephone conversation with Yasser Arafat. "What we understand is that this meeting is not part of the negotiation process, but is to discuss the new attitudes surrounding that process. It is not the resumption of talks. That is what we understand, anyway," said Moussa.

Asked if Cairo believes the meeting to be well-timed, Moussa responded that Egypt "cannot prevent" this kind of meeting. "In fact, it is important for them to talk; but to talk about the settlement issue, which will be the number one issue on the agenda, or perhaps the only issue on the agenda."

Moussa stressed the importance to the Palestinians of being well informed about the real intentions of the Israeli government. "It is important for the Palestinians to hear it directly from the Israelis in the presence of the Americans," Moussa said. According to the Egyptian foreign minister, "This is the key; if the settlement policy, particularly in East Jerusalem, is to continue, the chances of progress in the peace process are slim."

While providing moral support to the Palestinians, Egypt — with the support of the Syrians — is still trying to make sure that the Arab side does not give too much in return for very little. According to one source at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, "In hastily scheduled meetings with the Moroccans and Jordanians, Egypt is going to rally Arab support against resuming negotiations while settlement construction is under way."

As one senior Egyptian diplomat put it, "This is not just about the settlements. This is about the whole approach in dealing with Netanyahu. It is a matter of whether or not Netanyahu wants to change and become a man of peace."

Arab MPs urge halt to normalisation

A conference of the Arab Parliamentary Union, held in Cairo this week, blasted Israel for its anti-peace policies. Gamal Essam El-Din attended

Parliamentarians from 18 Arab countries gathered in Cairo this week for the seventh conference of the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU), focusing on the revival of Arab solidarity and establishing a common Arab market. The call for the halt of the normalisation of Arab relations with Israel also figured prominently on the agenda of the four-day gathering.

Conference chairman, Morocco's Mohamed Galal El-Said, addressing members of the APU in the presence of President Hosni Mubarak last Monday, called for "greater pressure on Israel, so that it may conform to the will of the world community, honour its commitments contained in the peace agreements and stop the construction of settlements on Arab land in Jerusalem."

At a preliminary meeting at the People's Assembly on Monday, the APU's members unanimously chose Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of the Egyptian People's Assembly, to serve as the APU chairman for a two-year term starting next January. The conference was officially opened on Tuesday by Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid.

In an address to the conference, delivered on his behalf by Sorour, President Mubarak said the Arab world was facing major challenges, both regional and international. In regional terms, the peace process has stalled as a result of "the construction of illegal Israeli settlements, the Israeli aggression on Arab and Islamic rights in Jerusalem and the expropriation of Arab land. These actions run counter to the spirit of peace and the agreements concluded with the Palestinian Authority and violate the inalienable rights of the brotherly Palestinian people," Mubarak said.

He urged the APU to make a greater effort to evolve an effective formula for the establishment of a common Arab market. This was made necessary, Mubarak said, by the emergence of various economic blocs and mergers on the world scene.

Mubarak also urged the APU to encourage the Arab people to actively contribute to the political life of their countries. "Arab parliaments are the most capable institutions to safeguard democracy and reflect the will of their people," he said.

Abdel-Meguid also lashed out against Israel's policies which, he said, were intended to destroy the peace process. Like Mubarak, he called for a revival of Arab solidarity and the promotion of Arab economic cooperation.

El-Said emphasised that "conditions will never soften our determination to press ahead with the struggle to support Arab rights in Palestine, the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon, lift the illegal embargo imposed on Libya and Iraq, and solve the problem of Kuwaiti prisoners [in Iraq]."

The APU supported the establishment of a common Arab market, which should not be "confined to economic aspects, but extend to encompass intellectual, cultural, information and educational aspects." The first steps towards this objective should be the free movement of Arab capital in Arab countries, eliminating trade barriers, establishing an Arab free trade zone and unifying Arab economic laws, he said. Before its official opening on Tuesday, the APU branched into two committees, one political and one economic, to debate the two principal issues on its agenda: reviving Arab solidarity and establishing a common Arab market. At the meeting of the political committee on Monday, a verbal exchange broke out between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi representatives.

Kuwait's Mubarak El-Khiring argued that the "reasons which led to the disruption of Arab unity" should be debated before the revival of Arab solidarity was discussed. He accused Iraq of detaining a large number of Kuwaitis in its prisons.

The committee's chairman, Ismail Abdel-Ghani of Syria, interrupted El-Khiring and asked him to stop. Iraq's Saad Kassem Hammoudi then demanded the floor, and suggested the establishment of a fact-finding committee to investigate the Kuwaiti charge. El-Khiring objected to this, pointing out that an international committee is already working on the issue of the Kuwaiti prisoners.

Shaker Said of Syria commented that the international community did not address important issues on a footing of equality. "Israel is left to be the bully of the region, and unfair resolutions are taken to impose a siege on some Arab countries," he said. He also called for joint Arab action to solve problems with "neighbouring countries," such as the water problem between Turkey, on the one hand, and Syria and Iraq, on the other.

Iraq's Said El-Kaddi accused the United States of taking an "aggressive" position against the Iraqi people and regime. Ali El-Khalili of Lebanon complained of the Israeli aggressions against southern Lebanon. Mohamed Ragab of Egypt called for "practical plans" to foil Israeli attempts to nurture divisions between the Arabs.

At the end of the conference yesterday, several political and economic recommendations were adopted. In political terms, the proposed measures included halting any move towards normalising Arab relations with Israel and achieving a "historical reconciliation" between the Arab countries. The conference also called for activating the role of the Arab League with the aim of strengthening joint Arab action, and establishing an Arab court of justice to settle inter-Arab disputes.

In economic terms, the conference called for directing the bulk of Arab investments to Arab countries, giving the private sector a greater share in Arab economic development, and the promotion of inter-Arab trade.

Elections at Press Syndicate

Elections to fill the chairman's post at the Press Syndicate were given the go-ahead this week. Shaden Shehab reports

The Press Syndicate's council, at an emergency meeting on Monday, decided to accept nominations for the chairman's post between 7 and 12 June and scheduled the elections for 22 June. The council's decision was based on an agreement reached earlier between the Syndicate's chairman, Ibrahim Nafie, and Mahfouz Shouman, head of a judicial committee entrusted by law with supervising the elections of professional unions.

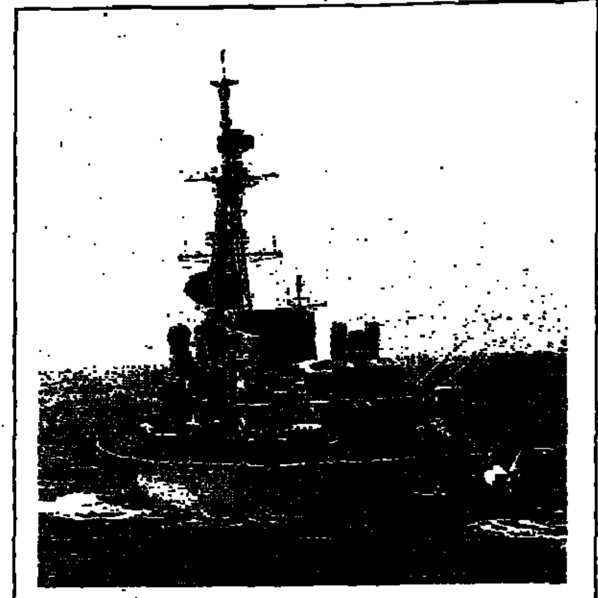
The decision also resolved a legal dispute, resulting from discrepancies between two laws that regulate the Syndicate's activities, on whether the elections should be held or not. The council previously set 27 March for elections, but a number of journalists filed lawsuits with administrative courts demanding that the election plans be scrapped. They also demanded a settlement of the legal dispute over which law should be followed: the Press Syndicate's Law 76 of 1976 or Law 100 of 1993 which provides "democratic guarantees for trade and professional unions."

The former law stipulates that the chairman is elected every two years for a maximum of two consecutive terms. If it were invoked, Nafie, who was elected for a second term in March 1995, could not run for re-election and new elections would have to be held. Law 100, however, stipulates that the council of a professional union, presumably including the chairman, is elected for a four-year term, thus making it possible for Nafie to remain in office.

The administrative court of the State Council threw out a lawsuit filed by Mahmoud El-Tohami, board chairman of *Rose El-Youssef*, which contested the Syndicate council's previous decision calling for elections on 27 March. The court said it found the lawsuit unacceptable because the decision to organise the elections was not the council's responsibility but the prerogative of the judicial committee entrusted by law with supervising the elections of professional unions.

The committee's decision setting the elections for 22 June, which was reached in consensus with Nafie, meant that the Syndicate's activities are regulated by the two laws, the first governing elections to fill the chairman's post and the second the election of the 12-member council. Six council members who are required by the Press Syndicate law to contest the elections along with the candidates for the chairman's post will not be allowed to do so, in line with Law 100 that stipulates that the council members are elected every four years.

The elections will be confined to the chairman's post in accordance with the Press Syndicate law.



Egypt and US battle, in simulation

Two Egyptian and American frigates fought a simulated battle as part of a four-day naval exercise in the Red Sea. Galal Nassar was there

The Egyptian-American Eagle Salute naval exercise has been an annual event since 1992, but this year, for the first time, the participating Egyptian and American forces 'fought' each other as simulated enemies, instead of training as a joint force. According to the rules of the battle, each side was left to rely on its own resources, waging a mock battle according to a plan kept secret from the other side.

The USS Halyburton, a guided-missile frigate, left a Red Sea naval base on Monday morning, heading for the theatre of operations, a 150-nautical mile long and 50-mile deep area, extending from Hurghada to a point south of Al-Quseir. It was followed by Al-Zafer, an Egyptian frigate acquired from China. In the course of their journey, the two frigates staged refuelling and salvage exercises. They also fired at surface targets, detected others underwater and dropped depth charges on them.

The simulated battle began on Monday night, the fifth of the lunar Muslim month, when the moon is hardly visible. Officials said the date had been chosen carefully to make it difficult for the participating forces to spot the 'enemy'. During the battle, both frigates received support from a high-tech command-and-control system.

The American vessel, which carries two SH-60 Lamps helicopters, was assisted by an advanced P-3C reconnaissance plane, which had flown all the way from an airforce base in Hawaii. This plane helped the frigate, which is armed with surface-to-surface Harpoon missiles, direct its fire and also served as a communication link between the frigate and the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. The Egyptian frigate had the support of E2C early warning planes and Beachcraft reconnaissance planes.

In another section of the exercise, Egyptian F-16 jetfighters staged a mock surprise attack on the participating naval forces, which reacted by firing anti-aircraft missiles and artillery. The participating naval craft also dropped depth charges to repel a submarine attack.

The frigates returned to the Red Sea base on Tuesday night, and a series of panel discussions were later held to assess the performance of the participating forces.

Capt. Kevin Morrisy, commander of the USS Halyburton, said the participating American forces had benefited greatly from the exercise, and he extolled the understanding shown by the Egyptian command.

Admiral Ibrahim Youssef Ibrahim, commander of the Red Sea base, said the fact the two frigates 'fought' each other was the most important feature of this year's exercise. "This is real training, just like a real war," he said.

The participating forces, Ibrahim added, "focused on how to use the nature of the Red Sea threatre of operations to their best advantage. The Red Sea is the Egyptian forces' favourite theatre and they have learned to enlist its natural features as an added weapon."

He brushed aside claims that the cost of the exercise is exorbitant. "The exact opposite is true," he said, "because joint exercises make advanced units available to us at no cost. Moreover, the gains we make from learning about the military thinking of others cannot be evaluated in material terms."

In addition to the Eagle Salute naval exercise, Egyptian and American ground forces have been staging the Bright Star manoeuvres once every two years since 1979. This year's Bright Star will be staged in September in the Western Desert and along the northern coast.

Exploring the future of Arab culture

Intellectuals from 17 Arab countries grappled with plans for the future of Arab culture at a conference held in Cairo this week. Rania Khallaf reports

Culture Minister Farouk Hosni opened a conference this week on the future of Arab culture that brought together writers and thinkers from 17 Arab countries. As the participants debated what needed to be done to enable Arab culture to flourish, differences emerged on whether a cultural "open door" policy should be pursued.

Ahmed Abu Zeid, a professor of anthropology, called for bridges to the outside world and openness to other cultures. The Arab world, he said, needs "a specific strategy that defines the way of dealing with international changes and challenges."

Borhan Ghalion, a Syrian intellectual, objected, expressing fears of foreign cultural hegemony that "could destroy our national heritage."

Abdallah Abdel-Dayem, another Syrian, advocated what appeared to be a compromise. He said that the Arab-Islamic culture should become more flexible, without losing its identity and strength.

Several speakers stressed that greater freedoms were needed before a cultural renaissance could come about. Professor of law Hossam Eissa said that "without sincere criticism of the state and its policies, and even of our individual behaviour, our future will remain as dark as our present."

Sudan's Haidar Ali cited the absence of democracy and human rights guarantees, poverty, the dominance of a traditional educational system, illiteracy and religious fundamentalism as the obstacles to Arab cultural growth. "We should not expect a cultural revival, without making social economic and political progress in the meantime," he stressed.

Abdel-Baset Abdel-Moeti, a professor of sociology, complained that a "reactionary current is prevalent and obvious in many aspects of our social lives, hindering active political participation and creative writing, and marginalising our role in the international arena."

Participants agreed on the necessity of making plans for the future, but each suggested a different approach.

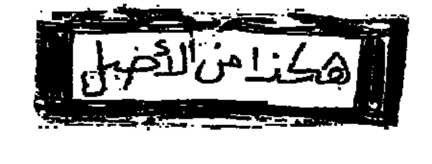
Ali Omleil, a Moroccan critic, insisted that the culture of the future should be a liberal culture, liberating the nation from any form of hegemony and allowing it to resist the "Zionist scheme to gain control over all Arab land."

Mohamed El-Sayed Said, deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, pointed to what he termed the decline of the middle class. This decline, he said, was due to the lack of democracy and deterioration in educational standards. Since the middle class plays a major role in producing modern culture, its deterioration will have negative results in the future.

Milad Hanna, an Egyptian housing expert, argued that a cultural revival would be impossible unless what he called the "textual culture" was replaced by a culture of dialogue and creativity. "Textual culture has prevailed in Arab countries for many centuries," he said. He put this partly down to the central influence of religion on society, with its accompanying stress on memorisation of religious texts.

Wahid Abdel-Meguid, another member of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said that cultural and political pluralism should run parallel, making room for dialogue and interaction between intellectuals.

In conclusion, the conference called for a new Arab cultural policy, based on the effective participation of intellectuals in public life. The intellectuals also affirmed the necessity of "criticising" the political and cultural policies of the state, if a new and developed society is to be built. They reaffirmed their complete rejection of any sort of cultural normalisation with Israel.



How to make a million, fast?

Gamal Essam El-Din explores ways to 'make a killing'

After many months of inactivity, the Cairo Stock Exchange began showing signs of recovery at the beginning of 1996. The recovery has been widely attributed to the government's decision to put as many as 90 public sector companies up for sale. The move, which reversed the nationalisation policies of the early 1960s, pushed share prices to record levels, causing a boom on the stock market. Suddenly, the stock market was being seen as a money-making machine for the affluent. Hefty profits could be made in little time, not only by trading on the market but by setting up related enterprises like stock brokerage and consultancy firms, charging high commissions. The boom has even lured the middle classes to use their limited savings to play the market.

According to the latest statistics provided by the Capital Market Authority, the government's decision last year to speed up the privatisation programme turned the Exchange into one of the most active 35 emerging stock markets in the world. The market value of shares registered on the stock market climbed from LE48.1 billion last year to nearly LE60 billion at present, while the number of listed companies rose from around 318 in 1985 to 645 last year. The number of companies whose shares are traded on the market jumped from 111 in 1985 to 354 in 1996, while the value of newly-issued shares and bonds increased from LE4.8 billion in 1994 to LE20.4 billion in 1996.

According to Abdel-Wahab Quota, deputy chairman of the Economic Committee of the People's Assembly, the boom has been fuelled not only by the sprint for privatisation but also by a law exempting sale-of-share profits from a two per cent tax. As a result, the capital market index doubled and many of the shares and securities in circulation began to earn attractive dividends.

Moreover, he added, foreign interest in the market peaked last summer after some of the shares of the Nasr City Housing and Development Company and the Financial and Industrial Company were put up for sale. The two offers, said Quota, attracted the attention of around 43 foreign mutual funds. These funds submitted purchase orders for 1.1 million shares of the Nasr City Housing and Development Company, although only 400,000 or 10 per cent of the company's four million shares were floated on the market. The Capital Market statistics show that the Exchange has been able to draw as many as 714 foreign mutual funds this year.

Cairo's stock market where fortunes are made in moments

However, Quota argued, much of the rise in share prices is "not realistic" but rather the result of fierce speculation. "In the recent period, the stock exchange has been at the mercy of speculators who make big profits at the expense of small investors, even though the latter are the primary targets of the privatisation programme." He estimated that the value of foreign speculative operations on the stock market climbed from a meagre $120,000 in 1995 to more than $700 million last year.

According to Quota, the number of securities brokerage companies climbed from a paltry 13 in 1985 to nearly 115 at present, with a total capital of around LE50 million. These companies, said Quota, are earning hundreds of millions of pounds by speculating primarily on the shares of real estate, finance and flour mill firms.

The brokerage companies are not above making under-the-table deals, Quota said. Although officially prohibited from buying shares themselves, the brokers nevertheless obtain them by using the names of relatives, friends and cooperating clients. "Then, they resell these shares at higher prices at the right time, after circumventing Capital Market regulations," he said.

Another tactic is to start rumours that the shares of certain companies will go up dramatically because they possess valuable assets or real estate. "This causes a rush on buying, with speculators selling at the highest possible price and also making hefty commissions," Quota said. "The price is bound to go down after clients discover that the rumours are groundless."

A third tactic is for speculators to acquire the shares allocated to the employees of the privatised public sector companies at cheap prices and then re-sell them on the Exchange at much higher prices, Quota said. In the past few weeks, the Capital Market Authority has had to step in, closing down 30 brokerage companies and referring three others to prosecution authorities.

Amani Hamed, executive manager of the Okaz brokerage firm, confirmed that some brokers resort to under-the-table deals by buying shares in the names of relatives and friends. This, she said, resulted from "the allocation system, by means of which the holding company which is putting the shares up for sale allocates the shares proportionally to meet the increased demand."

As a result, brokers could not buy their clients the number of shares they requested and were also denied the chance to generate hefty commissions. To get around this system, the brokers resort to the under-the-table deals, causing prices to soar and creating a black market because demand greatly exceeds supply, she said.

Mohamed Abul-Einein, president of Ceramica Cleopatra Company and a member of the People's Assembly, said stock market speculation was luring investments away from industrial projects. He cited the case of a businessman whose LE3 million capital swelled to LE15 million in two months by trading on the stock market. "Now, which is better, to speculate on the exchange or invest in industry?" Abul-Einein asked.

Mustafa El-Said, chairman of the economic affairs committee of the People's Assembly, attributed the rise in share prices to the ability of some brokerage firms to acquire inside information about the companies scheduled for privatisation. By acquiring information about the company's assets, projects and financial position before it is privatised on the stock market, brokers can direct demand to the shares of certain companies, thus forcing prices upward and making large profits, El-Said said. Like Abul-Einein, El-Said warned that speculation on the stock market was luring investments away from industry.

El-Badri Farghali, a leftist MP, claimed a young businessman made a profit of LE100 million in a short period of time by acquiring inside information about the sale of a public sector company. This businessman bought 10 per cent of the company's shares for LE20 million and, after prices skyrocketed, he was able to resell for LE120 million, Farghali alleged.

Magda El-Manesterly, president of Megavest Company, cautioned that speculation harmed the interests of small investors, although the privatisation programme was designed to protect them. She also complained that speculation had negative effects on investment in production.



TWENTY YEARS OF SOS: Marking the 20th anniversary of the Cairo branch of the international children's charity SOS, which runs villages for orphaned children, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak pledged her continued support for the welfare of children. She paid tribute to the efforts of Mrs Jihan El-Sadat, for her role in establishing the Cairo SOS

Reaching out to Sarajevo

Egypt is donating an orphanage to the Bosnian government, *affirming its close relations with Sarajevo.* **Dina Ezzat** reports

Under the auspices of Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, the Egyptian Red Crescent has raised about two million DM (LE4,000,000) to build an orphanage in the Bosnian city of Mostar. Construction started last week and should be completed in less than a year, to provide shelter to about 120 boys and girls who lost their parents in the civil war that tore apart former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995.

Although the Foreign Ministry undertook the arrangements for the construction project, the orphanage is being built by non-governmental funds. The construction work is being carried out free of charge by the Arab Contractors Company, according to Mahmoud El-Said, secretary-general of the Egyptian-Commonwealth Cooperation Fund, who recently returned from Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital. The Egyptian Red Crescent is paying for the construction materials.

"The idea of building this orphanage was raised by the chair of the Egyptian Red Crescent, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak, who has always maintained a dedicated interest in the welfare of children," El-Said said.

As expected, the idea was good news for the Bosnian government. "From the beginning, Egypt has played a major role in supporting the Bosnians through their ordeal and this orphanage is another step by which we can show our solidarity," he added.

During the past three years, Cairo has provided Sarajevo with governmental aid ranging between LE4-5 million annually. This aid has taken the form of medical assistance, professional training and Al-Azhar University scholarships for Bosnian students.

The governmental aid replaced the assistance previously given by the Human Relief Agency of the Muslim Brotherhood-controlled Doctors Syndicate. This aid was banned by the government for fear that the Islamists might use Sarajevo as another base for their anti-government activities.

"As a result of the government's success in replacing the Islamist aid, Cairo and Sarajevo now have very good security cooperation," an informed source said.

There are also political and economic factors behind Cairo's interest in promoting ties with the Bosnian government.

"The Bosnian economy is a nascent economy, offering good investment opportunities for the Egyptian business community," El-Said said. These opportunities include construction, agriculture and the export of durable and consumer goods, he added.

During a visit to Bosnia last week, an Egyptian official delegation finalised four agreements on the protection of investments and the promotion of trade. They will be ready for signing by the two governments within the next few weeks.

From a political perspective, it is in Cairo's interest to remain in close contact with Sarajevo given the potential for the growth of ties between Bosnia and the European Community and NATO. "This would make it possible for Cairo to have some sort of presence, indirectly, in these influential organisations in the future," the source said.

Moreover, the Bosnians have so far refused to open an embassy in Tel Aviv. According to the source, "This is making the Israelis very angry because they feel that they offered a great deal of support to the Bosnians during the war. This is certainly a bargaining chip that Cairo could save for its future dealings with Israel."

Nuclear officials reject 'intrusive' inspection

Nuclear experts reacted with suspicion to a plan by the IAEA to place all nuclear-related facilities under the Agency's supervision. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

Egyptian nuclear scientists and officials have expressed strong objections to a plan by the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to introduce a new safeguards system, by which all nuclear-related facilities and industries would be placed under the Agency's supervision. The scheme, they said, would "infringe on the sovereignty of the state and hinder progress in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy."

The objections are centred on 'programme 93+2,' which constitutes around 80 per cent of the plan. Officials have described the programme as a "burden on the shoulders of member-states, particularly developing member-states, of the IAEA."

"The intrusive nature of the newly-proposed safeguards system is very demanding and could impinge on the sovereignty of the state and hinder the development of the peaceful applications of nuclear energy," a senior official at the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

The obligations imposed by the programme fall into three categories. The first precludes new research and development of nuclear activities, the possession, acquisition, manufacture or stationing of nuclear weapons or explosive devices, or the stockpiling of weapons-usable materials. The second category requires the disclosure of all existing nuclear activities, including imports, exports and production. In the third, the IAEA assumes the right to conduct what it calls a "challenging inspection" — the inspection of any site it chooses at any time of the year, without prior permission of the state concerned. Even sites which are not nuclear-related may fall under the Agency's authority.

This means, a nuclear expert warned, that university and research centre programmes would be brought under the Agency's control, thereby placing immense financial and administrative burdens on those institutions and violating the secrecy of their projects.

According to Abdel-Gawad Emara, a former top official of the Egyptian Nuclear Energy Authority, the programme is intended to further the "exclusivity and hegemony which the United States seeks to maintain on nuclear weapons.

"It is meant to prevent any leaking of nuclear technology to other countries, particularly developing countries, and it is very demanding because it includes inspection of... specified non-nuclear material and equipment," he added. "In the final analysis, it can be stated that the implementation of 93+2 brings with it a number of political, social and technical constraints."

A spokesman at the IAEA told the *Weekly* that the programme was an extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and was part of the Agency's effort to turn the Middle East into a nuclear weapon-free zone. Another objective is to ensure that the "Iraqi model" is not repeated anywhere else, the spokesman said.

In response, Egyptian nuclear officials cited the existence of the "Israeli model." Israel's refusal to join the NPT and associate itself with the international community's efforts to turn the region into a nuclear weapon-free zone cannot be disregarded when a new safeguards system is being put into effect, stressed one nuclear official.

A source at the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority added: "There is clearly a source of nuclear proliferation in this region which needs to be dealt with in the context of the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime. All the available evidence suggests that the country in question has a clandestine nuclear programme that threatens regional and international security. The Agency's proposals for strengthening safeguards should be non-discriminatory, because otherwise they would lead to an imbalance between the obligations of member-states that are party to the NPT and those that are not."

A Foreign Ministry official agreed. "It is clear that the implementation of the programme will be primarily directed towards non-nuclear states, which creates a situation of preference and unfair treatment. This could seriously impinge on international efforts for non-proliferation and world peace," said the official, who asked that his name be withheld.

He noted that the world community had gone to great pains to uncover the Iraqi nuclear programme and a similar effort should have been made in the case of Israel.

The proposed system includes the use of digital video cameras and features the authentication and encryption of the surveillance data.

Sophisticated monitoring and control, front-end scene change detection and backup scene and data storage are integral parts of the digital camera. Surveillance images and data are transmitted to the Agency by means of low-cost, ultra-small satellite communications.

According to Emara, some of the technical aspects of the programme do not seem to allow the developing countries enough leeway to maintain the technological development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

"The developing countries would once again bear the brunt of the new constraints, without receiving any dividends in terms of technological development," he said. The nuclear-weapon states, which support the programme, should, therefore, set an example by announcing voluntary measures which they would undertake to improve the programme's credibility, Emara added.

Egypt, the Atomic Energy Authority official said, still believes that "innovative solutions and additional assurances are needed in order to preserve industrial, defence, commercial and technological secrecy. There is a need to minimise, or prevent, the new system from intruding into non-nuclear related fields."

Some materials in the nuclear fuel cycle are commonly used in non-nuclear industries, such as the energy, petroleum and chemical industries. In addition, dual-use equipment has important applications in non-nuclear industries and research, the official noted.

Where is the Samir?

The fate of a Cypriot freighter and its Egyptian crew remains a mystery two months after its disappearance off the Libyan coast. **Amira Howeidy** investigates...

The Cypriot freighter Samir, with 12 Egyptian crewmen and 2,850 tons of salt on board, set sail from Alexandria on 7 March, heading for Sicily. Two days later, it disappeared after stormy weather in the northern Mediterranean forced it to turn southwards and head towards Libyan territorial waters. There is no evidence that the ship sank. No distress signals were picked up by other vessels and no debris has been found by other ships searching for the vessel. Now, two months later, the mystery of the Samir's disappearance remains unsolved.

A source close to the case, who requested anonymity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that a satellite photograph taken a month ago shows the freighter in a military zone in Libya.

Another source, who confirmed the claim, said four other ships from different countries were also detained in the same zone.

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry has asked the Libyan authorities more than once about the ship's fate. "We spoke to them directly and officially and got no positive response. What more can we do?" said Mustafa Abdel-Aziz, assistant under-secretary for consulates and expatriates.

Responding to the report of a satellite photograph showing the ship in Libya, Abdel-Aziz said: "They [the Libyans] said they don't have it."

Inquiries made by the *Weekly* with the Libyan Embassy in Cairo and the Libyan Information Centre also drew no response.

The Samir ran into trouble on the second day of its voyage, when it was buffeted by strong winds blowing from the north. Its skipper communicated with the captain of another ship, the Med Queen, who advised him to turn southwards, in the same direction as the wind, until weather conditions improved. Heading south meant getting closer to Libyan territorial waters.

"We believe that the Samir's captain realised that if he did not sail with the direction of the wind, the freighter would overturn and sink," explained Sameh El-Badramani, representative of the owners, SFB Commercial and Shipping Company, in Egypt. "We were further encouraged when we found no trace of the freighter, which meant that it did not sink and that it is still in one piece, somewhere."

Ships from nine countries, including the US, Netherlands and Italy scoured the Mediterranean for 21 days, but found nothing.

The Samir was equipped with five Very High Frequency (VHF) devices and three radars that could have issued distress signals — but none was received by other ships. If these devices were disabled for any reason, the Samir was equipped with an Eprib device above the control cabin or bridge. This appliance automatically breaks away from a ship's body as soon as it touches the water and sends signals for a period of 12 hours to satellites to which it is connected. But no such signals were received.

All evidence, therefore, points to the survival of the ship, allowing the families of the 12 missing crew members to continue to have hope. Some see the lack of positive response from Libya as a good sign. As Mawada Abdel-Rahman, the 31-year-old wife of chief engineer Mohamed Khamis, put it: "When someone takes something from you with no intention of returning it, they will deny having it, but if they linger and say they are still searching, then this means that there is a possibility of retrieving it."

Abdel-Rahman said at her Alexandria home that she was certain the ship was being held in Libya, but was mystified by the delay in releasing it. "The ship carried nothing but salt, which was loaded on board at El-Dekheila harbour. An open street runs parallel to this harbour and everybody can see what is happening. There are no gates, trees or anything else that could obstruct vision," she said.

In order to be allowed to work on a foreign ship, the crew had to get permission from the State Security Investigation Department. "So, they were all clean, no criminal records, nothing against them," Abdel-Rahman pointed out.

So far, she has written more than 50 appeals to President Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and the local press and media. "I will continue doing so, until I get some sort of response," Abdel-Rahman said.

The only response she has received, so far, was from journalist Moufid Fawzi, who raised the issue last week on his popular TV show *Talk of the Town*. Throughout the programme, Fawzi focused on one theory: that the ship did not sink and is being held captive in Libya.

According to El-Badramani, the ship's owners are losing $3,000 a day as a result of its disappearance and must also contend with pressure from various interested parties: Cyprus, the British insurance company, the country in which the Samir is registered, St Vincent, and the families of the missing crew.

"We are keen on preserving our good relations with Libya, and we also do not wish to endanger the lives of the 12 crewmen. This is why we have remained silent so far. But with so much pressure, silence may no longer be possible. Unless something positive materialises soon, we will be forced to raise the issue internationally and then it will be out of our hands, and no one will be able to keep it under control," he said.

"This is all a nightmare that will not go away," Abdel-Rahman said. "I just wish there would be a knock at the door and my husband would walk in. Only then will the nightmare end."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Message of peace and reconciliation

Zeina Khodr in Beirut examines the significance of the Pope's visit to Lebanon

10 May 1997 was a historic day for Lebanon. Pope John Paul II made a long-awaited visit to this country, the first by the head of the Catholic Church to Lebanon and the Middle East region in modern times. Last weekend Beirut made world headlines. But this time they were not about war or sectarian differences. Rather, they were about peace, national reconciliation and coexistence. Pope John Paul II's message to the Lebanese was about peace and "breaking down the barriers of mistrust erected by civil war and building a society open to Christians and Muslims alike."

The Lebanese government and people attach great importance to the Pope's visit to boost Lebanon's international image and give it world recognition after years of civil strife. The visit highlighted the great strides Lebanon has made in rebuilding itself. It also spotlighted Israel's occupation of territories in south Lebanon and the West Bekaa Valley and the repeated Israeli atrocities committed against innocent civilians.

The Pope's visit had special importance to Lebanon's Christians because the Pope presided over the closing ceremony of the special Synod on Lebanon, the first time the Catholic Church held a Synod on any country. Lebanon's Christians, who make up approximately 40 per cent of the population, dominated the country before the war and have looked for centuries to the Vatican and the West for moral and political support. They hope that John Paul's visit will strengthen their hand.

The Christians came out of the war feeling defeated and divided and reluctant to reconcile themselves to the Syrian-dominated government many of them see as undermining their country's independence. "Lebanon is not a free country. It has neither sovereignty nor independence. The parliamentary elections were held under Syrian control and Christians feel they are not represented in government and parliament," Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir said on the eve of the Pope's visit. Sfeir has been an outspoken critic of Syria's dominance over the country.

At the heart of the Pope's visit was the signing and publication of the Apostolic Exhortation, a 194-page document written by the Pope to outline Lebanon's future. Speculation was rife on the contents of the document, with many hoping it would support the 1995 Synod on the Church in Lebanon. On that occasion, Lebanese bishops called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from south Lebanon and the West Bekaa and of Syrian troops deployed in other areas in the country. Even though the Pope did not explicitly call for the withdrawal of Syrian and Israeli troops, the Pontiff called for the "complete independence of Lebanon". The Pope, in the document, also referred to the "menacing occupation of southern Lebanon" and to the presence of "non-Lebanese armed forces on the territory" as among the difficulties faced by the country.

About 35,000 Syrian troops are stationed in Lebanon and 2,000 Israeli troops occupy territories in the south of the country. The Lebanese government, however, does not consider the Syrians to be an occupying force. "The Syrians are playing a role in the stability of the country. They are still needed to maintain security," Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri has said. "The main problem for Lebanon is the Israeli occupation," he stressed. During brief discussions with the Pope at the presidential palace, Hariri asked the Pontiff's assistance in pressuring Israel to implement UN Resolution 425 which calls for its unconditional withdrawal from Lebanese territory.

Amid reminders of the destruction brought on by the war in the downtown Beirut area, the former green line during the civil war, the Pope issued an appeal for reconciliation between Christians and Muslims in order to "build real peace". In an open air mass attended by over 300,000 people, the Pope also urged the minority Christians to remain in their country.

During his visit, Pope John Paul II received a very warm welcome. Observers say that they have not seen this kind of enthusiasm generated by the Pope's foreign trips in recent years. There was definitely a strong feeling of euphoria and excitement in the air and the Lebanese were delighted whenever they could catch a glimpse of the Pope. Crowds lined the streets of Beirut as the Pope travelled in his Popemobile, throwing rice and rose petals and waving flags, balloons and tree branches. And when the Pope arrived on Saturday, church bells rang across the country. This welcome was enthusiastic in both Christian and Muslim areas.

By merely stepping onto Lebanese soil, the Pope told the world that the country can guarantee the safety and security of its visitors. The Pope was originally scheduled to visit Lebanon in May 1994 but the preceding February a bomb killed 11 people in a church north of Beirut and the trip was cancelled. This time around, the army mounted a wide-scale security operation. Up to 23,000 soldiers along with internal security forces were deployed in the country and the Pope was always heavily guarded by troops backed by helicopter escorts while gunboats patrolled the shores.

Over 300 high-ranking political and religious leaders were present at the airport to greet the Pope. His Holiness then blessed the land on which he stepped but, due to his poor health, he did not kneel to kiss the soil as he traditionally does. However, he did kiss soil collected from the five provinces of Lebanon offered to him in a bucket. Since his appointment in 1978, Pope John Paul II has always showed great concern for the situation in Lebanon. Throughout the war years, the Pope condemned the violence and urged coexistence.

On the eve of his visit to Lebanon, the Pope sent a message to the Lebanese. "I will be visiting your country very soon to carry out the holy mission I have been looking forward to for so long. My trip to Lebanon will be a pilgrimage to a country visited by the saviour 2,000 years ago," the message stated. By travelling to Lebanon, the Pope fulfilled his dream of visiting part of the Holy Land. There was sadness when the Pope left but the joy felt by the Lebanese, particularly the Christians, still lingers here.

Observers and officials hope the Pope's visit will reconcile the disillusioned Christian community, help complete national reconciliation and enhance harmony between Muslims and Christians. Now that the Pope has left Lebanese soil, it remains to be seen what kind of impact, if any, the Pope's message will have in building confidence among Lebanese citizens.



During a Christian rally north of Beirut, Pope John Paul II kisses a young disabled Lebanese woman *(photo AFP)*

Islah's dance and stumble

The Islamic Reform Party suffered a resounding defeat in the recent Yemeni elections. **Karim El-Gowhary** reports *on the party's current dilemma*

With the end results of the 27 April Yemeni elections finally out, it is only too clear who the loser is — the Islamic Reform Party, Islah. Only 53 seats in the 301-member parliament were secured by the Islamists — 10 seats less than in the previous elections four years ago.

Throughout the election campaign, Islah's optimism was unshaken. The Socialist Party, the country's former third biggest political force, boycotted the elections, so the cake was to be divided between just two parties — the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and Islah.

It is no wonder that Islah had whetted its appetite for a bigger piece of the pie. When it turned out that GPC had nearly managed to swallow the 'torta' on its own, an atmosphere of sober disappointment fell on the Islah's headquarters in Sanaa. Together with some successful independent candidates for parliament, who are considered close to the GPC, the Congress Party bloc consists of no less than 210 seats, more than two-thirds of the parliament.

Islah's supporters argue that they did not get what they were entitled to and point to unfair competition. "The number of seats won by Islah does not correspond to our political weight on the Yemeni ground," Islah's leader, Sheik Abdallah Al-Ahmar, complained in a recent interview in the Arabic weekly magazine, *Al-Wasat*.

His view was echoed by Nasr Taha Mustafa, chairman of the Yemeni Strategic Study Centre, which is considered a think-tank of Islah. "The GPC held all the cards in their hand: the military, security services, the state media and the Supreme Election Committee which was far from neutral," he said.

But Mustafa dismissed the suggestion that an Islah election boycott, similar to the Socialists', would have been a better option.

"If Islah had boycotted as well, the elections would not have taken place. The result would have been an emergency situation. Our participation was in the national interest. We were preserving democracy in our country, as marginal as it might be."

However, Mustafa admitted that Islah made some mistakes. Some of the Islah candidates were too weak. More finance should have been provided for the campaign, and there should have been better coordination between Islah and other opposition parties, he said.

Political analysts in Yemen cite other reasons for Islah's defeat. During the elections four years ago the Islamists were seen by many as the main counterweight to the Socialists. With the Socialists' boycott many voters lost their motive to vote for Islah, they claim. It also appears that most of the former Socialist voters turned to the ruling GPC.

Another reason behind the defeat could be the popular discontent with Islah's "two faces", presenting itself one day as part of the government and the next day as part of the opposition.

But it looks as if Islah's indecisive dance to position itself in Yemen's political landscape is not over yet. Islah must now determine whether it will be part of the government again or strengthen the opposition with its presence.

The GPC has the right to form the new government which will meet for its maiden session next Sunday. Until now the GPC strategy has been to keep everyone of political weight within government which is something it might continue, despite its healthy majority.

The country's president and leader of the GPC, Ali Abdullah Saleh, has left the matter open so far to further speculation, stating that his party will bear full responsibility in the new government and others can take part as "participants not as partners".

For Nasr Taha Mustafa such words activate warning signals. "We should draw the line if they say we can take part in the government solely to execute the GPC programme. We have our own programme and in this case the majority of Islah would vote for the opposition."

Last week's first post-election statement by Islah points in the same direction, hinting at a desire to enter the opposition. "The presence of Islah in the opposition will not affect its policy of supporting what is right and opposing errors," the statement read.

Islah's leader, Sheikh Al-Ahmar, remains somewhat ambiguous about the issue of Islah's participation in the new government. "An opposition is a healthy phenomenon and is necessary in a multiparty system and a democracy. We are for a strong opposition but we do not want to talk about things prematurely," he told *Al-Wasat*.

Talks about peace talks

US special envoy Dennis Ross' lastest visit to the Middle East was yet another failure. **Graham Usher** appraises the situation from Jerusalem

Despite a round of meetings with Arab, Israeli and Palestinian leaders, US special Middle East envoy Dennis Ross' second trip to the region in as many months has yet to produce any substantive breakthrough in the stalled Oslo process, moribund since Israel went ahead with building the Har Homa settlement two months ago. Given the US reluctance to intervene in the crisis in any meaningful way, most Palestinian and some Israeli observers believe the sole point of Ross' recurrent forays is now one of damage control, sustaining the illusion of life in a process that is dead.

This appears to be the logic behind the one so-called initiative that has been mooted during Ross' visit — a proposal to set up a Palestinian-Israeli committee to "decide an agenda of discussions" to resolve the five issues on which the process is snagged: Har Homa, settlements, security cooperation, Israel's second West Bank redeployment scheduled for September 1997 and the 34 other issues still pending from Oslo's interim agreement.

Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat have reportedly given their blessing to the idea and the joint committee was scheduled to hold its first meeting last night.

But there is little disguising the anger Palestinians feel over Ross' increasingly ineffectual involvement. Chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat charged that Ross does not "bring with him new proposals and initiatives," complaining that, faced with the current crisis, "the US has no strategy". Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesman Marwan Kanafani was blunter still. In an interview with the US *Time* magazine, Kanafani said the PA was demanding that a new US mediator be appointed to replace Ross, "since he has lost the confidence of the Palestinians."

There is substance to the Palestinian grievances. Ross' visit had been predicated on the PA resuming security cooperation with Israel, a commitment authorised by Arafat following his meeting with Israel's President Ezer Weizman on 6 May. In return, the hope had been that Ross would throw his weight behind a call from the European Union (EU) for Israel to freeze all settlement construction for the duration of the final status negotiations under the Oslo Accords. "What do you think of the idea?" Arafat asked the US special envoy in Gaza on 8 May. Ross was non-committal.

Ross obviously is implementing the policy of his president. According to American officials quoted in the Israeli press, neither Clinton nor his administration is averse to a "settlement freeze" in principle. But they believe Netanyahu is unable to deliver such a commitment given the political make-up of his coalition. And Clinton is not prepared to get into a fight with Congress to force the matter. The result is Ross' fruitless journeys to the region.

The aim, however, is attrition, wearing out Palestinian patience until the PA backs down on its insistence that any return to negotiations be accompanied by a halt to the Har Homa construction in particular and a freeze on all settlement building in general. So far, Arafat has stuck to these demands, enjoying diplomatic support from the Arab and Islamic world, the EU and elements of the Israeli opposition. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories hope he will go on resisting, and for very practical reasons.

According to Israel's Peace Now Settlement Watch and the Palestine Geographic Centre, the Israeli government is currently building 4,000 housing units in 60 different settlements in the West Bank and occupied East Jerusalem. It has also approved the construction of a further 4,000 units in the same areas. While some of this construction takes place in settlements like Emmanual near Nablus and along the Jordan Valley, most is concentrated in settlements on Jerusalem's north, south and eastern fringes. The objective, says Palestinian geographer, Khalil Tafakji, is to merge annexed East Jerusalem with the West Bank territory of "Greater Jerusalem" as an inseparable part of Israel. As for Palestinians living in villages that are currently under the PA's civic jurisdiction but inside "Greater Jerusalem", their fate is to become "Palestinian passport holders on Israeli land," says Tafakji.

These settlement ambitions tie in with a "secret plan" exposed by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 11 May. The report alleges that Jerusalem's Likud-led municipality and Interior Ministry have been quietly working on a scheme to establish a "mega-Jerusalem municipality" that would incorporate the West Bank settlements of Maleh Adumim, Givat Zeev, Beitar and Gush Etzion ahead of Oslo's final negotiations on the status of Jerusalem.

While Jerusalem municipality officials have been loath to comment on the report, Israel's interior minister, Eli Suissa, has been less reserved. On 16 April, he stated publicly, "Israel should consider annexing areas beyond Jerusalem's eastern boundaries. We should ensure they become part of Jerusalem so that the Jewish majority of the city will grow."

Coupled with the settlement drive, the plan, if realised, would seal the future of Jerusalem. Whether the Oslo process continues or not, Jerusalem would become a city whose sovereignty is Israeli and whose demography, overwhelmingly, is Jewish.

Israel bent on torture

Refusing to abide by the UN Anti-Torture Convention, Israel describes the routine torture of Palestinian political detainees as "moderate physical pressure." **Gamil Ibrahim** reports from Geneva

The Geneva-based UN Committee Against Torture, concluded a two-week long session last Friday by issuing a strongly-worded statement condemning the Israeli government's institutionalised use of torture during the interrogation of Palestinian prisoners.

Dismissing the term "torture", the Israeli side rationalised their position with a euphemism. "[The security forces] use *moderate physical pressure* in efforts to elicit information that could foil pending terrorist attacks", their statement read.

The committee, however, refused to accept the Israeli justification. Committee members explained that the so-called "moderate physical pressure" includes, among other things, restraining and holding prisoners in extremely painful conditions, sleep deprivation over long periods of time, subjecting detainees to loud music, death threats, violent shaking and the use of cold air and/or water to alter the body temperature. In an attempt to defend the "moderate physical pressure" used, Nili Arad, director general of the Israeli System of Justice, claimed that interrogations were in fact "monitored" and "supervised" by professional medical staff.

"What do you mean by monitoring and supervising?", fumed Bent Sorenson from the Committee Against Torture. "If a detainee dies following Israeli interrogation and the autopsy results state that cranial trauma caused by violent shaking is the cause of death — doesn't this indicate that torture has taken place?" Sorenson also referred to reports of a statement by the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin admitting that at least 8,000 Palestinian detainees had been subjected to violent shaking during his tenure.

Moreover, Shai Nitzan, senior deputy to the state attorney of the High Court of Justice of Israel, admitted to the committee that some methods of investigation used by the Israeli security services in "extreme situations" have not yet been revealed.

The committee also expressed its concern about a November 1996 ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court which rejected an interim injunction against the use of torture on a particular detainee. The committee declared that such rulings actually sanctioned and legitimised the use of torture.

As a result of its findings, the committee concluded that the routine and standard use of such methods indeed constituted torture as defined by Article 1 of the Anti-Torture Convention. Consequently, the committee demanded that Israel — a signatory to the Convention Against Torture — immediately cease to use all methods that violate the Convention — stressing that, "no circumstances... even the terrible dilemma of terrorism which Israel faces... could justify torture."

Responding to Israel's justification of torture, the committee stated that the signatories to the Convention were precluded from justifying the use of torture even in exceptional circumstances. In this context, committee member Peter Burns explained, "Israel has not incorporated the standards for the Convention into its domestic law, believing that standards for the treatment of detainees could be modified depending on circumstances — while these standards are absolute."

Following their investigation and after an extensive, but inconclusive, exchange with the Israeli delegation, the committee concluded that the Israelis will not change their position. Dismissing all evidence to the contrary, the Israeli delegation refused to admit that interrogation in accordance with the infamous "Landau rules", which legitimise "physical pressures", does in fact breach prohibitions against "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment" as stipulated in Article 16 of the Convention Against Torture.

Despite the committee's condemnations and added international pressure, it is clear that Israel is determined to continue to torture Palestinian political prisoners — in accordance with its Landau recipe.

Regional sympathy for a defiant Gaddafi

The Libyan president's breach of a UN air embargo may have angered America but observers closer to home support his action. **Rasha Saad** reports

Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi's supposed violation of a UN air embargo against Libya last week has been welcomed by Egyptian political observers.

Gaddafi is accused by the West of violating UN air sanctions, imposed in 1992, when he flew to Niger and Nigeria to lead prayers for the Muslim New Year.

Last Thursday, the US State Department said that it was investigating the reports of Gaddafi's action and planned to raise the matter at the UN Security Council and its Sanctions Committee.

But Gaddafi's defiant three-day trip has been welcomed by many observers. Fahmi Howeidi, a prominent Egyptian political analyst, approved Gaddafi's move. He said that the fact that the US uses the UN as its tool of deterrence is worth a challenge. "When there are no rules, it is Gaddafi's right to do what he wants. Both Libya and the US are in a game the end of which cannot be conceived," he added.

To highlight what he sees as US double standards, Howeidi cited the US refusal to condemn Israel for the Qana massacre last year and the lifting of the embargo on the Serbs despite all the massacres they were involved in. He contrasted this with the US sanctions imposed on countries like Libya, Iran and Sudan and the accusations that they support terrorism.

Abdel-Samei Zeineddin, a former Egyptian diplomat, also approved Gaddafi's air trip saying that the siege which is tightening around the Arab world is the reason behind Gaddafi's act. At a time when there are military agreements and exercises between Israel and Turkey, there are international sanctions imposed on Iraq and Libya, he added.

Libya has been under an international air embargo — added to arms and diplomatic sanctions — since 1992 for its refusal to extradite to Britain or the United States two suspects in the bombing of a Pan-Am aircraft over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 which killed 270 people.

But observers believe that the US will not be able to get the UN Security Council to condemn Libya for breaking the ban, just as it refused to condemn Iraq for violating the air embargo last April. Both Russia and China refused to condemn Iraq for flying pilgrims to Mecca and insisted that Iraq did not violate the embargo. Observers believe that both countries will adopt the same position for Libya. However, this is not the first time that Libya has defied the ban.

Libya flew pilgrims to Mecca in April 1996 and in March 1997. In June 1996, Gaddafi travelled by air to Cairo to attend the Arab summit.

Earlier this year, the Libyan foreign minister warned that his country would ignore the ban after allowing a US balloonist to cross its airspace during his attempt to circumnavigate the globe. Libya at first declined permission for the American adventurer, then relented following international pressure. A Libyan airliner flew to Ghana shortly after this incident.

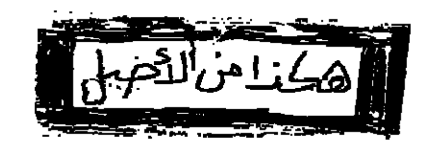
Since the imposition of the sanctions in 1992 there have been many suggestions of how to settle the Lockerbie issue.

Among them, the Arab League called on the UN Security Council to hold the trial at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, with Scottish judges enforcing Scottish laws. Libya has also said that it is willing to bring the two suspects to any neutral country to be tried. In July 1996 South Africa offered to host the trial of the two Libyan suspects and a spokesman for the UK relatives of the Lockerbie victims confirmed the families' agreement. However, all suggestions were rejected by the US and the UK which insist on holding the trial either in Scotland or the US.

Mufid Shehab, president of Cairo University and a professor of international law, believes that the Lockerbie issue is a political rather than a legal issue. According to him, there is no international convention or agreement that commits Libya to hand over the two suspects. "There have been several possible solutions for this problem and relatives of the victims are ready to reach a compromise. However, the US is using this issue as a way to pressure the Libyan regime. It is high time the UN reconsidered its position on this matter," he said.

Zeineddin also said that the US itself shot down an Iranian aircraft carrying civilians during the first Gulf War. "Thus it is illogical to take that harsh position towards the Libyan suspects," he said.

During the Arab Labour conference held in March at the Arab League, Libyan officials briefed Arab officials on the economic hardships suffered by their people as a result of the sanctions, which they said had cost Libya some $19 billion. Agricultural and livestock sectors have suffered the most, according to Libyan officials, with losses estimated at $6 billion.



Jury still out on Kabila

Is Kabila prepared for the many challenges ahead? asks Gamal Nkrumah



Kabila's ADFL troops march on the Zairean capital Kinshasa. A little boy follows excitedly *(photo: Reuters)*

"My long years of struggle were like spreading fertiliser on a field. *Now it is time to harvest,*" said leader of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) Laurent Désiré Kabila at a press conference in Lubumbashi a few days ago. There could have been no peaceful *resolution to the Zairean crisis.* The ADFL's march had to be swift. Had the advance on the capital been any slower, the momentum of the people's euphoria might have slackened. Kabila had to seize his moment.

On Monday, the ADFL nationalised Zaire's railways prompting the US to warn that Kabila "needs a lot of seasoning in the democratic process." Washington's Ambassador to the United Nations Bill Richardson added that "the jury is still out" as far as Kabila's democratic credentials are concerned. On Tuesday, the Americans notified their citizens in Zaire to leave the country immediately because they could not guarantee their security anymore.

Time to jump ship? On the contrary, more businessmen are clambering aboard despite the fact that the ADFL took the unprecedented move of halting the sales contract between Minière de Bakwanga (MIBA), the largest diamond producing concern in the country, and South Africa's De Beers.

Hitherto, De Beers, which regulates world diamond supplies and prices through its Johannesburg-based Central Selling Organisation, guaranteed an annual income of $70 million to MIBA and Mobutu's Zaire. Today, MIBA's diamonds are auctioned to the highest bidder and the ADFL and Kabila's new Zaire stand to gain the most. The long-term economic and political results of such an auction are bound to be far-reaching. If the money stream continues, not only will ADFL cadres benefit but some outsiders will lose out. For instance, Lebanese diamond traders were sent packing when the ADFL took over Mbuji Mayi, the capital of the Kasai Province and site of the MIBA headquarters.

Zaire's besieged President Mobutu Sese Seku has agreed to step down but he is still entrenched in Kinshasa. Many thought that he had stepped for the last time on Zairean soil when he left Zaire for a visit to Gabon. There was much speculation that Mobutu would use the trip as a first leg of a journey into exile in a third country. Most observers believed that Mobutu would head for the French Riviera. Many see an escape to Villa del Mare, his extravagant Riviera hide-out, *as Mobutu's last resort. In the end, Mobutu* proved them wrong by returning to the beleaguered Zairean capital.

In Mobutu's Zaire appearance was often a matter of life and death. Ruthless Zairean gov*ernment troops punished people for having long* beards or bald heads. The victims were tortured and forced to pay fines. The spectacle of the emaciated Mobutu, bedecked in colourful safari suits, hardly competes with the rotund and down-to-earth Kabila who in plain Mao Zedong tunics draws all eyes. The ailing Mobutu has lost all his looks. The president is actually no more.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Kisangani, Laurent Monsengwo, was recalled from the Vatican and chosen as the new Speaker of the Zairean Parliament. According to the Zairean Constitution, Monsengwo will replace Mobutu if the latter resigns as President of Zaire. Kabila rejects the idea of Monsengwo as interim president or kingmaker presumably because the archbishop is too much of a Mobutu man. In a direct attack on Zaire's 738-seat transitional national assembly, ADFL Foreign Minister Bizima Karaha told reporters in Lubumbashi airport last Friday that the ADFL took exception to Zaire's parliamentarians. "We are not fighting Mobutu. We are fighting a system and in that parliament there are people who are part of that system," said Karaha.

Kabila rejects the notion that the ADFL's plan to make him president is unconstitutional. He says that most of his countrymen support him. Mobutu's rise to power was made possible by financial assistance provided to him by the US, Belgium, France and the UN to secure the army's loyalty. Nowadays, less rightist officials rule the roost in Washington and Mobutu's troops have been an embarrassment on the battlefield. For their part, the ADFL troops are disciplined and determined.

Westerners fear the forced nationalisation of private companies but they fear looting by soldiers and civilians in Kinshasa even more. In 1992, an uprising in Kinshasa and other major towns wreaked havoc upon foreign establishments. Foreign properties were ransacked and foreigners assaulted.

Last week, France took its cue from the US and the UN and rejected Kabila's 60-day ultimatum for the repatriation of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire. Kabila permitted access by hu*manitarian aid workers to the Rwandan refugee* camps but warned that the refugees must be repatriated within 60 days. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, called Kabila's deadline "unrealistic" and the US State *Department stated that Kabila's ultimatum is* "most unhelpful".

Noel Obotela Rashidi, newly installed by the ADFL as the deputy governor of the Upper Zaire Province, told reporters in Kisangani that the Hutu militias and *former* Rwandan *army* troops, fearing the advance of the ADFL, forcibly led the refugees through the equatorial jungles of eastern and central Zaire to use them as a human shield and cannon fodder. "That's why the [ADFL] *wants to repatriate the refugees as* soon as possible in order to clear out the entire zone. The [Rwandan refugees] who stay behind in the forest are definitely criminals," Rashidi said.

Rashidi's *views were reiterated by Emmanuel* Kamanzi, the ADFL representative in liaison with UN organisations and aid agencies. "These Rwandans fought against us. Without them, we would have taken Kinshasa in three months and *now the UNHCR is protecting them.* We do not agree," Kamanzi said.

The Western media, however, reports that ethnic conflict between Tutsi and non-Tutsi ADFL troops threatens to tear the movement apart. *Newsweek* recently reported that Kabila, an ethnic Luba, fears that the "Tutsis are after his head." The report added that Kabila "has surrounded himself with Angolan bodyguards and an Angolan pilot, and in recent weeks, he has spent most of his time in the southern city of Lubumbashi, far from the Tutsis." But, "*Newsweek* is spreading lies," an African diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Unfortunately, such lies often lead to horrendous human tragedies and unspeakable atrocities," he added.

The new armies emerging from the Ugandan, Rwandan and Zairean civil wars are real war machines. Mobutu's army was essentially an internal security apparatus. It was neither designed to protect the country's borders nor to take part in regional wars. Mobutu's senior army officials were big arms dealers. According to the ADFL, troops from Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and mainly ethnic Hutu ex-FAR (Rwandan Armed Forces) now form the bulk of the pro-Mobutu army.

Kabila's good fortune is that a deal with Washington is close at hand. The Americans will "play ball" if Kabila does not stifle the development of multi-party democracy and make *it difficult for Western mining concerns to do* business in Zaire. Kabila has won the Western companies over, too. Zaire will be privatised but Kabila must provide for Zaireans. He must come up with the funds to rebuild the country's derelict *infrastructural* base and provide *now* non-existent educational, health and social services.

How does the ADFL measure up against these requirements? As well as could be expected. "We want lower taxes, sound government and less *interference* in the *economy,*" *said* Mwana Nanga Mawapanga, the ADFL's financial commissioner and overseer of the ADFL's dealings with Western multinationals. The ADFL has African nationalist tendencies and Marxist origins but the multinationals' *concerns must not* be exaggerated.

So which multinationals matter? The lucrative gold mines of the Kivu Province are exploited by a number of Western and South African concerns including France's Empain-Schneider, Britain's Cluff Minerals, Canada's Banro and South Africa's Anglo-American. Union Minière of Belgium controls Cobalt production in the Shaba Province. Copper production in Shaba is by Canada's Consolidated Eurocan Ventures, South Africa's Johannesburg Consolidated Investment and Zaire's Gecamines. The Dutch IDAS Resources group, American Mineral Fields and Australia's Anvil Mining all have a big stake in the zinc mines of the Shaba Province. *Société Zairo-Italienne de Raffinage* owns Zaire's largest oil refinery.

Not all of the multinationals are Western, though. China's Machine Building Corporation is constructing a number of small-scale hydro-electric schemes in the Kasai Province and the Guandong provincial government exploits the vast timber reserves in the forests of the Equateur Province.

Kabila has had longer than most other revolutionary African leaders to prepare for the job of running Zaire. He says that he is ready for the challenges ahead. Most observers believe that Kabila and his ADFL are equal to the tricky task of both restructuring the Zairean economy and revolutionising its political and social structures.

What about the Middle East?

A new party, a new government, but where is the new Middle East policy? Jasim Al-Azzawy reports from London

Historians, especially Arab ones, are fond of likening Britain's relation to the United States to that which existed between Rome and Athens. The implication is obvious; the powerful, youthful and internationally inexperienced US draws on British political wisdom *and its invaluable* colonial experience in the Middle East to its own benefit. But that analogy is flawed, at least for two reasons. First, it presupposes a lack of creative American *analytical power* to comprehend the region's history, conflicting players and policies, and how to promote American strategic interests in one of the world's most vital regions. Second, the US has demonstrated a subtle political savvy in gently dislodging Britain from its traditional Middle Eastern sphere of influence, first after the Suez Canal fiasco in 1956, but especially in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War peace.

It is of paramount importance to keep in mind the American-British nexus while interpreting early signs of *the new* British government's future policies in the Middle East. Efforts to unmask Blair's Mid-East policies are complicated by his party's exclusive emphasis on Europe during the election campaign.

It was no secret that Bill Clinton did not enjoy a cordial relationship with Major because of the American ad*ministration's position vis-à-vis North*ern Ireland and its decision to allow Jerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, to visit the US. In contrast, visible signs of pos*itive chemistry flourished* between Blair and Clinton when they met early this year. Political observers expect a consolidation phase to follow when they meet again at the end of May in The Hague, Holland, during the 50th anniversary celebration of the Marshall Plan.

Following the remolding of the Labour Party and its adoption of many Tory policies, it is now difficult to separate the two ideologically and most remaining differences are esoteric.

Labour's Middle East policy is unlikely to be very different from that of the Conservatives. Thus, the new government is expected to support the peace process, emphasise Palestinian rights, reject Israeli claims on any part of Eastern Jerusalem and display vociferous opposition to illegal Jewish settlements.

Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's right arm is Derrick Fattchet who replaced Jeremy Hanley as state minister for foreign and commonwealth affairs in charge of the Middle East and North Africa. Fattchet, who is known for his support of the Palestinian cause, op*poses the Israeli settlement policy and* advocates leaving all details of Jerusalem's status to the final status negotiation. Fattchet is expected to embark on an early tour of the region to meet with Arab leaders. Cook is not previously known to support either Israel or the Arab side.

Major thwarted French President Jacques Chirac's desire to influence the Middle East negotiations' final outcome. Blair, who is keen to be seen as a European player, may soften traditional British opposition and permit the French to resume their efforts. But one historical fact remains undeniably clear. During the Thatcher years (1979-1990), British politics witnessed an incredible rise in the influence and number of Jews in prominent political positions.

Equally true, the Labour Party has been a staunch ally of Israel. During his campaign, Blair never tired of repeating the mantra that Israeli-British relations are at their zenith and pledged that he would "not repeat the mistakes of previous Labour leaders during the Eighties." These leaders were viewed as antipathetic to Zionist causes.

Like the Conservatives, Blair has courted the Jewish community for its disproportionate influence within the *elite of British society. Some in the* Jewish community, however, doubt whether the old "Israel-haters" within the Labour Party have been forever silenced because they still retain sub*stantial grass-roots support* within the party.

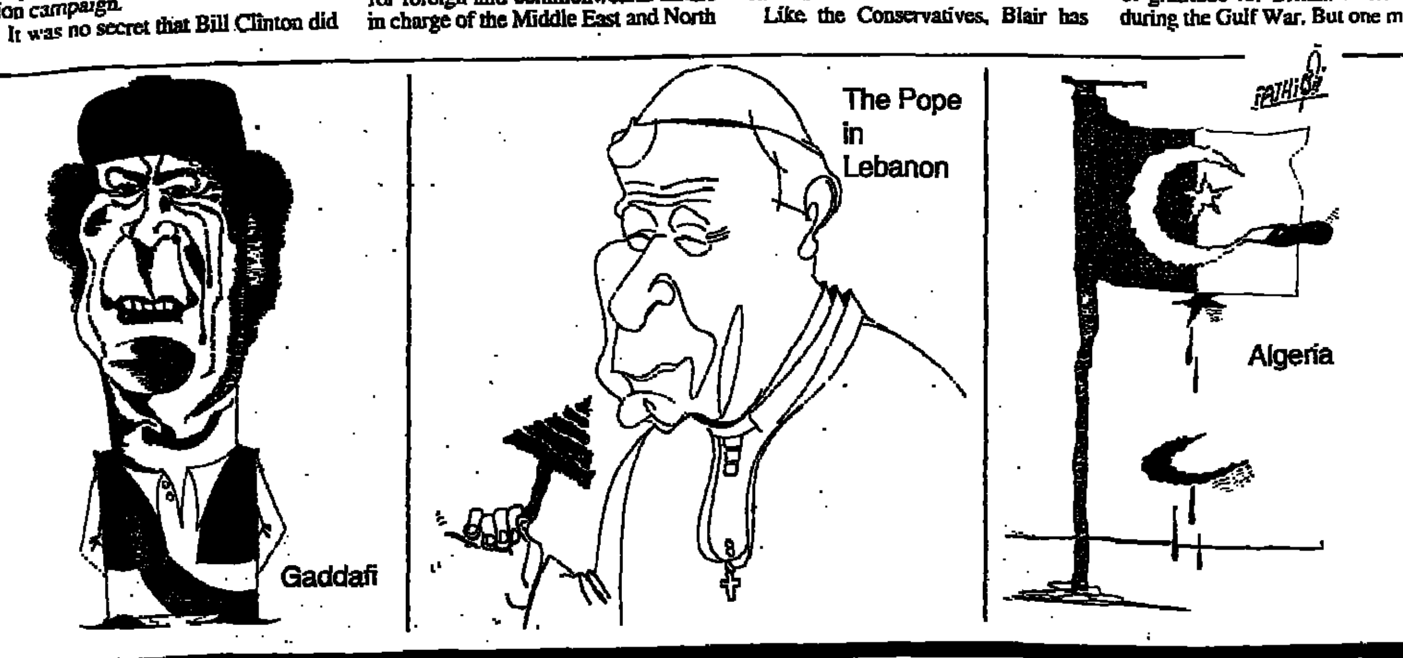
Additionally, during the campaign, Blair paid highly publicised visits to a mosque and Muslim community centres and praised Muslim contribution to British society. Mohamed Sarwar, the first Muslim member of the House of Commons from Scotland, will be the lonely voice representing the concerns of millions of British Muslims.

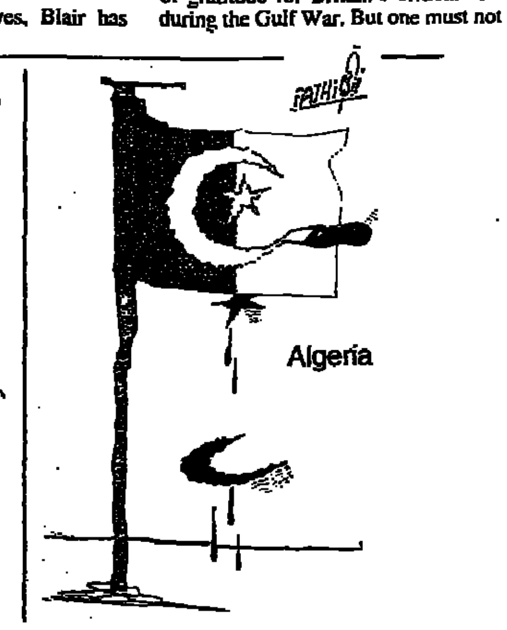
To offset British Zionist influence, one is reminded that Blair has inherited from his Tory predecessors lucrative trading relationships with the Gulf countries. These include massive arms contracts with Saudi Arabia that secure high paying jobs for thousands of British workers. The new government is bound to display sensitivity towards Saudi concerns for Islamic holy places in Jerusalem as well as Israeli settlement policies. Equally important, British-Kuwaiti ties can only improve as a result of the Kuwaiti eternal sense of gratitude for Britain's critical role during the Gulf War. But one must not fall into the trap of exaggerating Arab leverage power, and by extrapolation, *British capacity to pressure either* Washington or Jerusalem.

It is noteworthy that Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad was among the first world leaders to congratulate the new government. Assad also called for a British role "within a European position" in the Middle East peace talks while *Tishreen*, the Syrian government paper, welcomed Blair's victory by underlining the pro-Israel bias of previous Tory governments. Robin Cook can further develop British-Syrian ties and build on bilateral relations that newly improved as a result of exchanges of official visits between Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa and Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind.

Last week, Arab political observers took note of two balancing acts by Foreign Secretary Cook that reflect the interests of the new government and the pressures to which it is subjected. The first was a statement he made after meeting his French counterpart Hervé de Charette. "I'm concerned about the current stalemate in the peace process. If there's no progress it will eventually fall apart. That's why it's so important that we restore momentum to the peace process," he said. The second was the amazing speed with which he called for an international conference to be convened in London to look into the whole issue of WWII Nazi gold deposited in Swiss banks. British papers have revealed that convening the conference was a fulfilment of a promise made to former Labour MP Grevel Ganer, head of the British-Jewish Council, who led efforts to spend remaining funds on the Holocaust Memorial.

The Old Labour Party may have changed its skin, but its margin for *manoeuvre* on the international stage, excluding Europe, will remain slim. That means that marked departure from the Thatcher legacy will not be easy or possible. After so long an ab*sence from political decisions and the* comfort of observing an active American policy from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf, Blair's new government will savour its movement in locked *step with Washington.*





Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Euro-socialism's Euro-dilemma

Is a facelift for social democracy in *Western Europe good enough?* Hosni Abdel-Rehim from Paris finds out

*Europe, or rather the European Union, remains top of the polit*ical agenda in France as in much of Europe today. The upcoming French parliamentary elections might prove to be a litmus test for the true feelings of the French towards European integration.

*According to the latest opinion polls, French voters are un*decided and the issues at stake remain blurred. Will France gain from a closer European political, monetary and economic union? Former Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard summarised Europe's predicament thus: "Although Europe is utterly dependent on Japanese technology and has been colonised by American money and culture, a European renaissance is now in the making."

The loss of national sovereignty associated with European unity worries many in France and in the rest of Europe, yet, it is widely recognised that in unity lies strength. While it is true that the power of individual nations has declined since World War II, Europeans have fought back by first establishing a common market and, at present, by vigourously promoting economic, monetary and political unification.

French President Jacques Chirac called for a general parliamentary election 10 months ahead of schedule in order to secure a fresh mandate to rush through reforms to prepare France for further European integration. However, the French left, the opposition Socialists, Communists and Greens, want to focus instead on France's shameful unemployment figures, a record 12.8 per cent. *The Socialists say that they can create 700,000* new jobs for the youth by slashing the work week.

The ruling Rally for the Republic (RPR) and Union for French Democracy (UDF) are accused of planning massive job cuts in the public sector as part of their plan to speed up Eu*ropean integration. Chirac counter-argues that a left-wing gov*ernment would empty state coffers and hamper European integration by further bloating the French government deficit.

The European left is torn between a need to reaffirm their commitment to Europe and their determination to ensure social justice. Recently, the need *for the left to combat attacks on the* welfare state has led to the formation of new alliances and strategies. This started during the Italian elections with the "Olive Branch Coalition" essentially grouping the Social Democrats and the Democratic Party of the Left (the former Communist Party) *to challenge the centre-right coalition with an alliance of* the centre-left. The aim of the Italian left was to capture the middle class vote, a constituency with an unstable voting pattern that historically fluctuates between support of the left and the centre-right. The strategy of the leftist coalition was to revamp its *image for the benefit of the middle classes by some*what distancing itself from its traditional working class constituency.

The same strategy was adopted by Tony Blair's "New Labour", with the recent British elections proving its astounding success. After 18 years of Thatcherism, *replete with drastic so*cial budget slashes, state subsidy cuts and union busting, the new strategy finally tipped the balance. The "New labour" leadership understood the real need for change and veered the party's course towards the centre by eliminating its radical base and breaking rank with the trade unionists. Tony Blair adopted a "liberal" social programme with the aim of keeping the government out of centralised economic policy planning.

This strategy succeeded in attracting a sizeable middle class constituency and revamped the British Labour Party on the model of the American Democratic Party. Accordingly, Tony Blair, like US President Bill Clinton, won the elections by capturing the middle class vote. Faithful to his model, Blair produced a British version of Clinton's campaign strategy and political slogans — assimilating even his media image.

In the run-up to the elections in Britain, like in Italy, the main campaign issue centred around the European Union. According to the centre-left campaign rhetoric, both the radical left and the radical right oppose unification, albeit for different reasons. While the left challenges unification because it fears the dismantling of the welfare state and high unemployment rates unleashed by unfettered and blind market forces, the right opposes unification because it sees it as threatening national sovereignty and identity.

As for the centre-right, its vision of unification hinges on unimpeded capitalist growth modelled after the US and Japanese economies.

Distancing itself from the traditional right and left, the new centre-left aspires, at least in its campaign-speak, to a more "humane" concept, namely, a European form of social democracy that safeguards education, health and employment rights.

The French left, both Socialist and Communist, seems to have learned from the recent British and Italian experiences and is adopting similar strategies in the current legislative election campaign by loosely combining economic neo-liberalism with an adjusted version of the welfare state.

Even Alain Juppé's rightist government is now cautiously attempting to edge closer to the centre-left in order to gain more middle class votes and thereby potentially displace the Front National, the radical right-wing party, in the upcoming elections.

By adopting this kind of strategy, Juppé is also hoping to gain the portion of the middle class vote which might go to the left. Since the middle classes are especially frightened of losing their relatively comfortable standard of living, Juppé is hoping that his sudden political change of heart might at the end of the *day deliver the votes.*

In this context, it is telling that Philippe Seguin, the former leader of the National Assembly and a member of the ruling party, now warns the government of the potential political instability and social upheaval that would be caused by the *growth of unimpeded neo-liberalism.*

Deep social and cultural divisions between the individual countries of Europe remain but the social spending cuts required by the monetary union are throttling state subsidies and the concept of the welfare state across the board. Economic retrenchment policies have caused wide-scale social unrest and mass demonstrations that threaten political stability. Such mass action is a peculiarly European phenomenon caused by the political weight of the Socialist and Communist parties and the trade unions.

Despite its efforts, the French government is facing major obstacles in choosing a more moderate centrist course. After having preached the virtues of the free market as necessitated by the European fiscal union, which requires less government and less social spending, among other things, it is difficult to revert to support of the old concept of the welfare state. Juppé's government — like other governments in the European Union — faces the dilemma of having to compete with the US according to an economic model that precludes social spending. However, the growing opposition at home still prevents European states from scrapping the welfare state altogether and embracing the American model.

Misr Exterior Bank



THE FRIENDLY BANK
THE DISTINCTION

BALANCE SHEET AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1996
(Amounts expressed in Egyptian pounds)

ASSETS	1996	1995
Cash on hand and with Central Bank	518,475,462	439,454,208
Current account and deposits with banks	669,362,923	803,207,874
Total cash on hand and at banks	1,187,838,385	1,242,662,082
Investment in securities (Net of provision)	1,043,641,651	498,475,717
Loans and advances to customers (Net of provision)	1,453,700,585	1,009,751,290
Debtors, other debit balances	20,095,718	9,008,990
Equity participation (Net of provision)	7,226,934	4,071,933
Fixed assets (Net)	33,520,465	31,223,696
Total assets	3,746,023,738	2,795,193,708
LIABILITIES AND SHAREHOLDERS EQUITY		
Demand deposits	429,192,578	329,562,426
Time deposits & saving account	2,496,198,908	1,946,424,673
Saving certifications	12,174,000	24,963,000
Other deposits	119,181,110	92,635,841
Total deposits	3,056,746,596	2,393,585,940
Banks and correspondents		
Due to local banks	279,904,197	108,067,732
Due to correspodents banks abroad	8,587,926	3,824,510
	288,492,123	111,892,242
Dividends payable		
Creditors and other credit balances	22,234,800	19,091,800
Other provisions	124,893,043	49,936,453
	31,873,192	29,668,489
Shareholders' equity	100,100,000	100,100,000
Authorized capital	51,100,000	51,100,000
Issued capital	51,100,000	51,100,000
Paid-up capital	150,233,889	124,933,889
Reserves	20,450,095	14,984,895
Retained earnings	221,783,984	191,018,784
	3,746,023,738	2,795,193,708
Total liabilites & shareholder's equity	562,080,504	378,060,064
CONTRA ACCOUNTS		

MOHAMED NABIL IBRAHIM
Chairman of Board

ABDALLA ABDEL FATTAH TAYEL
Deputy Chairman General Manager & Managing Director

IGNACIO FIGAREDO
General Manager & Managing Director

STATEMENT OF PROFIT APPROPRIATION FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 1996
(Amounts expressed in egyptian pounds)

	1996	1995
Net profit for appropriation	53,000,000	46,000,000
Retained earnings	14,984,895	9,676,695
	67,984,895	55,676,695
To be appropriated as follows :		
Legal reserve	5,300,000	4,600,000
General reserve	20,000,000	17,000,000
Board of Directors remmeration	1,699,800	1,461,800
Dividends to the shareholders	17,885,000	15,330,000
Employees profit sharing	2,650,000	2,300,000
Retained earnings	20,450,095	14,984,895
	67,984,895	55,676,695

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 1996
(Amounts expressed in Egyptian pounds)

	1996	1995
Interest received from customers & banks & securities investment	253.383.563	216.103.286
Interest paid to customers & banks	(204.010.807)	(175.732.919)
Net interest	493.727.56	403.703.64
commissions & other income	612.856.71	565.397.89
Total revenue	110.658.427	969.101.53
LESS		
General & administrative expenses		
Depreciation & amorization		
Net income before provisions		
LESS		
General & administrative expenses & provisions	537.554.27	473.831.53
net profit before deprecition	569.030.00	495.270.00
depreciation	390.300.0	352.700.0
Net profit for appropriation	530.000.00	460.000.00

The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 1996
(Amounts expressed in egyptian pounds)

	1996	1995
Cash Flow from Operating Activities:		
Net income	53,000,000	46,000.000
Adjustments to reconcile net income to net cash provided by operating activities		
Depareciation and amortization	3,903,000	3,527,000
Provisions	17,181,584	13,127,762
Provision used	(2,510,141)	(1,508,328)
Depreciation differences of prior years		(150,000)
Net operating profit before changes in other assets and liabilities	71,574,443	60,996,434
(Increase) in debtors & other debit balances	(6,956,738)	(5,130,584)
Increase (Decrease) in creditors & other credit balances	74,956,590	(31,506,697)
Increase in trading investment securities	(9,308,057)	(8,465,758)
Increase in loans & advances to customers	(456,416,035)	(275,928,363)
Decrease (Increase) in deposits with banks	135,478,438	(435,993,700)
Increase in customers deposits	663,160,656	492,834,990
Net cash provided by (used in)operating activties	472,489,297	(203,193,678)
Cash flow from Investing Activities:		
Increase in equity participation	(3,155,000)	(1,114,200)
Proceeds from selling of National development bonds	1,053,122	2,341,504
(Increase) Decrease in Treasury Bills	(156,500,000)	483,150,000
Purchase of Egyptian Treasury Bonds	(237,186,000)	(120,000,000)
Purchase and down payment of fixed assets	(10,329,758)	(18,980,629)
Proceeds from sale of fixed assets		700
Net cash (used in) provided by investing activities	(406,117,636)	345,397,375
Cash Flow From Financing Activities:		
Increase in due to banks	176,599,881	43,204,734
Dividends paid	(19,091,800)	(13,918,800)
Increase in the paid up capital		7,000,000
Net cash provided by financing activities	157,508,081	36,285,934
Net increase in cash and cash equivalent	223,879,742	178,489,631
Cash and cash equivalent at January 1st	795,487,802	616,998,171
Cash and cash equivalent at December 31st.	1,019,367,544	795,487,802
Cash and Cash equivalent at December 31, 1996 are represented in:		
Cash in hand & with the Central Bank of Egypt	518,475,462	439,454,208
Current accounts with bank	74,392,082	72,758,594
Treasury bills (maturity within three months from balance sheet date)	426,500,000	283,275,000
	1,019,367,544	795,487,802

AUDITORS REPORT
To the Shareholders of Misr Exterior Bank-S.A.E.

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Misr Exterior Bank-S.A.E. represented in the balance sheet as of December 31, 1996, income statement and the statement of cash flows for the year then ended. These financial statements are the responsibility of the bank's management. Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audits.

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on auditing and the requirements of relevant local laws and regulations. Those *Standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free of material misstatement.* An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting the amounts and disclosure in the financial statmeents. An audit also includes assessing the accounting principles used and significant estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall financial statements presentation. We have verfied the assets of the bank, and have ascertained that the valuation of the said assets and of the bank's liabilities is in accordance with the International accounting standards, we have obtained the information and explanations which we deemed necessary for our audit. *We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our opinion.*

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Misr Exterior Bank-S.A.E. as of December 31.1996 and the results of its operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with International Accounting Standards, also the bank maintains proper books of accounts which include all that is required by law and by the statues of the bank and the accompanying financial statements are in agreement there with, thus we have ascertained that none of the transactions undertaken by the bank contravened *with law No. 163 for the year 1957 and amendments thereof.*

The financial information referred to in the report of the board of director prepared in compliance with Law No. 159 of 1981 and the executive regulations there is in agreement with the books of account of the bank.

Wahid Eldin Abdel Ghaffar
(Shawki & Co.)

Mohamed Fahmy
(KPMG Hazem Hassan)

MISR EXTERIOR BANK S.A.E.

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 1996

I. THE BANK'S ACTIVITY
Misr Exterior Bank S.A.E. was established on October 16, 1981 under Law No. 43 of 1974 (as amended), which was replaced by the Investment Law No. 230 of 1989. The object of the bank is to carry out all banking operations in local and foreign currencies and to finance foreign and internal trade.

II. SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES APPLIED
The financial statements were prepared in accordance with International accounting standards and in compliance with local laws and regulations, indicated herein the significant accounting policies:

a. Recording Interest Income, Expenses and Other Bank Commissions
The bank follows the accrual base in recording the interest income and expenses. The accrual of interest on loan (interest income) is discontinued when there is an indication that the borrower may be unable to meet payments as they become due. Other bank commissions are recorded at the date of transaction

b. Translation of Foreign Currencies
The bank maintains its accounts in Egyptian pounds. Transactions in foreign currencies are recorded during the financial year at the exchange rates prevailing within the foreign currencies free market the time the transaction is concluded. Balances of monetary assets and liabilities in foreign currencies are revaluated at the end of the financial year at the prevailing exchange rates on the date, gain or losses on revaluation are taken to the income statement.

c. Valuation of Investment Securities
1. Investments securities are stated at cost net of provision for the decline in the value of it.
2. Investments in the Treasury Bills are stated at their nominal value, and the difference between the present value at balance sheet date and the nominal value is stated in the creditors and other credit item on the liabilities side of the balance sheet.
3. The National Development Bonds denominated in US. Dollars are stated at the book value as amended by translation differences according to the rate of US$ at the end of the year. This is considering that such bonds are retained until maturity date.
The Egyptian Treasury Bonds are stated at book value (cost), as these securities are being held until maturity.
4. Equity participation's are valued at cost. A provision for the fall in the value of investments is made whenever it is deemed necessary.

d. Loans and Advances
Loans and advances are stated net of provision for doubtful debts. A specific provision for doubtful debts is made based on management's assessment of the loan portfolio. In addition, a general provision is made determined as a percentage of the other customers loan and contingent liabilities.

e. Depreciation and Amortization
a. Fixed assets are depreciated using the straight line method at appropriate rates for each category of assets.
b. Renovation expenses of the bank's premises are amortized over a period of three years.

f. Taxation
Provision for liabilities is made for tax claims after comprehensive study of such claims, in view of nature of the tax inspection and assessment in Egypt the paragraphs relating to deferred tax included in the international accounting standard for taxes on income has not been applied.

g. Statement of Cash Flows
For the purpose of presentation in the statements of cash flows, cash and cash equivalent includes cash at the Central Bank of Egypt, current accounts with banks and treasury bills maturing three months from the balance sheet date.

III. INVESTMENT IN SECURITIES AND EQUITY PARTICIPATION
a) Investment in securities amounted to L.E. 1,043,631,651 as of December 31, 1996 representing the following :

	1996 (L.E.)	1995 (L.E.)
Investment in trading securities	18,777,651	9,469,595
Investment in Treasury Bills	*568,000,000*	368,275,000
Investment in National Development Bonds	—	1,053,122
Investment in Egyptian Treasury Bonds	357,186,000	120,000,000
	1,043,963,651	498,797,717
Less : Provision	322,000	322,000
	1,043,641,651	498,475,717

b) The value of Equity Participation are stated at cost net of provision at the financial statement date amounted to L.E. 7,226,934. The value of the commitments relating to these participation which have not been called for settlement up till balance sheet date amounted to L.E. 3,092,500 as follows :

	Participation % (L.E.)	Subscribed nominal value (L.E.)	Amounts paid (L.E.)	Amounts have not been called (L.E.)
International Real Estate *Tourism Development Co.*	22%	3,850,000	962,500	2,887,500
Egypt Banks Company for technological advancement	1%	400,000	200,000	200,000
Egyptian Company for Support of Industries	1%	20,000	15,000	5,000
		4,270,000	1,177,500	3,092,500

IV. LOANS & ADVANCES
Loans and advances amounted to L.E. 1,453,700,585 as of December 31, 1996 representing as following :

	1996 (L.E.)	1995 (L.E.)
Loans & Advances to customer	1,498,726,429	1,042,339,784
Less: Provision for doubtful debts	*45,025,844*	32,588,494
	1,453,700,585	1,009,751,290

V. DEBTORS AND OTHER DEBIT BALANCES
Debtors and other debit balances amounted to L.E. 20,095,718 as of December 31, 1996 representing as follows :

	1996 (L.E.)	1995 (L.E.)
Interest receivables	12,588,894	5,708,762
Pre-paid expenses and down payment for purchasing fixed assets	6,790,974	2,594,065
Expenses for preparing and fixturing branch premises	132,396	70,382
Other debit balances	583,454	635,781
	20,095,718	9,008,990

VI. FIXED ASSETS (NET)
The fixed assets (net) balance includes the following:
1. An amount of L.E. 231,500 representing the value of purchasing a land for Zamalek Branch according to the preliminary contract.
2. An amount of L.E. 2,299,000 representing the value of purchasing the premises of Zamalek Branch according to the preliminary contract.
3. An amount of L.E. 192,000 representing the value of purchasing the premises in Giza to be used as a Bank Archive according to *the preliminary* contract.
Registration procedures are currently in process to register the premises in the bank's name.

VII. CREDITORS AND OTHER CREDIT BALANCES
Creditors and other credit balances amounted to L.E. 124.893,043 as of December 31, 1996 represented as follows :

	1996 (L.E.)	1995 (L.E.)
Interest payable	37,873,290	25,754,060
Deposits to other	64,082,166	4,593,195
Accrued expenses	8,198.617	6,695,451
Other credit balances	14,938,970	12,893,747
	124,893,043	*49,936,453*

VII. PROVISIONS
The movement and balance of the provisions at the balance sheet date are as follows:

	Balance 1/1/1996 (L.E.)	Provided for 1996 (L.E.)	Used during 1996 (L.E.)	Balance 31/12/96 (L.E.)
Provision for doubtful debts	32,588,494	12,466,740	29,390	45,025,844
Provision for decrease in value of securities	322,000	—	—	322,000
Provision for decrease in equity participation	2,343,700	—	—	2,343,700
Other provisions				
Provision for general risks	3,780,601	1,840,204	—	5,620,805
Value of foreign currencies	1,438,820	180,660	—	1,619.480
Other provisions	24,449,068	2,693,980	2,510,141	24,632,907
	29,668,489	4,714,844	- 2,510,141	31,873.192
	64,922,883	17,181,584	2,531,531	79,564,736

IX. CAPITAL
The bank's authorized capital amounts to L.E. 100,100,000 and the bank's issued capital amounts to L.E. 51,100,0000 represented in 730,000 shares of nominal value L.E. 70 per share.

X. *SHARE HOLDERS' EQUITY*
The movement of the share holders' equity accounts during the year as following :

1996	Paid up *capital*	Legal *reserve*	General reserve	Capital reserve	Special reserve	Retained earnings	Total
Opening balance	51,100,000	19,570,413	68,553,321	1,788,188	35,021,967	14,984,895	191,018,784
Additions	—	5,300,000	20,000,000	—	—	5,465,200	30,765,200
Balance at the end of the year 1996	51,100,000	*24,870,413*	88,553,321	1,788,188	*35,021,967*	*20,450,095*	221,783,984
1995							
Opening balance	44,100,00	14,970,413	51,553,321	1,787,488	35,021,967	9,676,695	157,109,884
Additions	7,000,000	4,600,000	17,000,000	700	—	5,308,200	33,908,900
Balance at the end of the year 1995	51,100,000	19,570,413	68,553,321	1,788,188	35,021,967	14,984,895	191,018,784

XI. MATURITIES OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

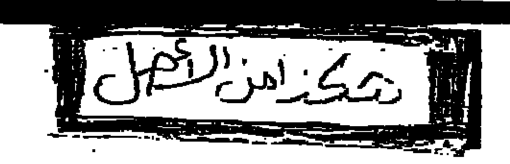
	Due in one year	Due in more than one year
Assets		
Banks' current accounts and deposits	669,362,923	—
Investment in Treasury bonds & bills	668,000,000	357,186,000
Loans and advances to customers	1,450,196,797	3,503,788
	2,787,659,720	360,689,788
Liabilities		
Time deposits	2,447,196,000	49,003,000
Saving Certificates	6,282,000	5,892,000
Due to local banks	279,904,197	—
Due to corresponditles	8,587,920	—
	2,741,970,123	54,895,000

XII. RELATED PARTY TRANSACTIONS
The bank transacts with the shareholders within the normal course of business.

XIII. COMPARATIVE FIGURES
Certain comparative figures are reclassified to comply with this year's presentation.

Activities Growth Rates in 1995

Total Footing	+ 34 %	Shareholders Equity	+ 16 %
Total Deposits	+ 28 %	Total Revenues	+ 15 %
Total Loans	+ 44 %	Net Profits for appropriation	+ 15 %
Productivity per worker	+ 9 %	Financial Investments & Shares	+ 109 %



Not quite business as usual

As privatisation continues apace, businessmen are emerging as important players on the national stage, a situation that has provoked increasing criticism. *Al-Ahram Weekly* spoke to Ibrahim Kamel, one of the most successful and outspoken members of the business community


photo: Ayman Ibrahim

Ibrahim Kamel, chairman of the Kato Group, is one of Egypt's most successful businessmen. Hailing from what be describes as "a perfectly ordinary Egyptian middle class family" — he was born in 1941, in Abassiya and raised in Shubra — Kamel is now reputed to be one of Egypt's wealthiest men.

Educated at Cairo University, where he gained a first from the department of commerce, Kamel went on to complete a masters in business administration at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

The American Chamber of Commerce lists Ibrahim Kamel as an international trader, a description that does not quite do justice to his various business interests. *Currently he is seeking to* establish a private airline. He already has aviation interests and manufactures civil aircraft. He is the majority share holder of the Egyptian British Bank and a *newspaper proprietor*, having bought the economic daily *Al-Aalam Al-Yom*. Nor is he a stranger to controversy. His property development, First Residence, a housing complex for the super-rich, became the centre of heated debate while more recent investments in Israel have also provoked criticism.

In the '60s Ibrahim Kamel was a member of the Arab Socialist Union. In the '70s he was one of the first Egyptian businessmen to embrace Sadat's open door policy. Never far from the centre of power, he now heads the Egyptian side of the American-Egyptian Presidents' Council.

Are there any contradictions in these seeming shifts of position? Ibrahim Kamel would say no, defending his Israeli investments in roundly nationalist terms — "I insist on the necessity of dealing with Israel. Egypt is the only country which can influence decision-making inside Israel" — and is vociferous, despite the extravagantly conspicuous consumption embodied in the First Residence complex, on the social responsibilities that the business community should assume, inviting comparisons between himself and Talaat Harb.

What was the thinking behind your purchase of shares in Koor, Israel's largest industrial organisation?

My motivation was to make a statement to everybody that Egypt and Israel are bound by a peace treaty which both sides have to respect. Part and parcel of this is to act normally. We have to il*lustrate that the right thing to do is to support peace.*

Also, the majority of Israelis do not support the present Israeli government's policy, and are for peace. *Just before the Hebron agreement* the whole region was on the brink of collapse. We are now facing a similar impasse, so I decided to accept an invitation received during the Middle East-North Africa Economic *Conference (MENA III) from the* president of Koor Industries. I visited Israel for two days. My message was very clear: that there is basically no problem between Egypt and Israel, but that Egyptians *demand* that current *Palestinian*-Israeli negotiations accommodate Palestinian aspirations for a just and lasting peace.

Also I said that the question of the return of the Golan Heights and withdrawal from southern Lebanon are issues which are not negotiable.

But such a message [of peace] has to be supported by action. I said that I was very impressed with the management of Koor, and was ready to buy some shares in Koor. The next day people said I had bought a majority of shares. All I can say is I bought a small number of shares because I am only *investing inside Egypt* and *not outside*. Whatever investments we make outside Egypt are minimal, they cannot even be put on a balance sheet.

In light of negative developments on the peace **front, do you still view your investments as sound?**

I still insist on the necessity of dealing with Israel. Egypt *is the only* country *which* can *influence* decision-making inside Israel. Real peace will never be achieved without the 60-plus million Egyptians becoming friends of Israel.

Israelis know this and so for them the perceptions, the general attitude of Egyptians is very important. We should not change our course of action just because the other side has adopted a policy we do not agree with.

What do you think of the reactions provoked by the news of your Israeli investments?

The reaction of the Egyptian media and of certain Egyptians in this respect was expected. It is a normal reaction for people who disagree on the way of doing things, certainly as regards dealing with Israel.

However I still feel that I have a case to defend and I will continue to defend a policy that is wise and meaningful and that can produce results.

Did you obtain political approval before undertaking this step?

Frankly, no, I did not obtain political approval because I did not go to Israel representing any organisation but as an Egyptian individual representing himself. The government of Egypt has never prevented any Egyptian from going to Israel. This is my impression, and it is actually a fact.

You are the first Egyptian businessman to own a newspaper. Do you see the paper as a lobby for business interests?

First of all, I am an admirer of the newspaper's editor, Emadeddin Adib. I also wanted to see Egyp*tian businessmen taking more interest in the printed* media. *Al-Aalam Al-Yom* was owned by the Saudi Sheikh Saleh Kamel. I felt it was time for an Egyptian to own a newspaper.

But it is only a transitional phase, until the paper can be handed over to someone else. There is no attempt on my part to influence the editorial policy of the paper.

Egyptian businessmen have been attacked for making huge profits through land speculation, the monopoly of multinational agencies, and for investing money abroad rather than in Egypt. Are such criticisms justified?

First of all, I agree with you that once in a while the newly established private sector comes under fire. But you have to keep in mind that the business community's role in society is not yet understood by the overwhelming majority of people. The press, the media and television can give a negative image *of the private sector.* NOr is academia any better at projecting an honest picture in the Egyptian community. This is perhaps because of a basic leftist orientation. Most of the country's opinion leaders are *leftist oriented. On the other hand, the behavious of* certain business people leaves a lot to be desired. Some have done great things, and some have done totally unacceptable things. We are talking about normal people who can make mistakes. And these mistakes are taken out of context. The actual development of the private sector in Egypt started to take place in 1985. Anything that happened before constitutes no more than a few isolated incidents. To answer your question specifically, we should understand that it is only natural for business people to diversify their activities in order to afford stability for their growing orgnaisations. We should not be afraid if we see industrialists having activities in other sectors of the economy, such as real estate development, tourism, agriculture etc. The importance of diversification cannot be overestimated and we know from experience this can enable organisations to continue to function even when one or more of the sectors could be hard-hit during a certain period. I believe negative perceptions of the business community will change with time. What will help facilitate this change is business people assuming greater social responsibilities. Then they will be perceived positively, and society will defend the new business community.

Speaking of social responsibility, you have, on more than one occasion, invoked the great entrepreneur Talaat Harb as a model to be followed. Why is this?

Talaat Harb really was a model. He had a very comprehensive outlook on industry and business. He appreciated the role of banking, that banks should support a wide base of industries. He launched projects, such as Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra — spinning and weaving — which remain, even today, commendable models. He developed communities, with housing, *with sports teams, with hospitals around them.* His commitment was total, and in my own way I have attempted to do the same.

I have never hesitated in supporting new busi*nesses until they can stand on their own feet.* Our company then withdraws, taking only what we initially put in. Annually we support at least two or three new businesses. And you should bear in mind *that all the youth centres in the villages surrounding* our facilities were built by our company and we continue to support youth centres until today.

I think if you visit the two villages we built in Assiut, after the floods, you would find that they are more like tourist resorts than traditional villages.

There is much talk of businessmen constituting a new political elite and exerting more influence on policy decisions. You are head of the Egyptian side of the US-Egypt Presidents' Council. Has the Council, at any point, acted beyond its mandate? Is this the reason for President Mubarak's announcement that the Council is an advisory and not a decision-making body?

This is a very good question. President Mubarak *just stated the truth. The Presidents' Council is an* advisory body. So, in fact, the president's comments were a correction of the growing perception that the Council is involved in formulating policies, which *is totally* untrue.

The Council is an advisory council to the president. It does not make or initiate policies. It does not have any executive responsibilities. It is purely advisory. This is how it should be, and this is how it will remain.

But the Council appeared to preempt the government when its spokesman, Taher Helmi, announced plans to privatise the strategic telecommunications sector...

I am sure Taher Helmi, being a lawyer, must have spoken of the corporatisation of the telecommunications sector, or of certain parts of this sector. And this is not an initiative coming from the Council but from the government. They wanted to corporatise certain parts of the telecommunications sector, and this is only a form of organisation, it does not involve privatisation or changing the ownership of this sector.

Corporatisation could make privatisation easier in the future if and when the government decides to privatise.

Bodies such as the Presidents' Council and AmCham have been accused of lobbying for American interests. How has the Council promoted the interests of Egypt's economy?

Such accusations lack any logical base. Speaking about the Presidents' Council, you should understand once more that this Council is an advisory body to the *president. The objectives of the Council* are to promote investments in Egypt, technology transfer and increased exports to the United States.

Therefore, the Council, if accused of lobbying for the *Egyptian interests, such an accusation might be* discussed. But to be accused of lobbying for American interests, permit me to say that this is totally rejected.

Do you believe that Egypt has reached the stage where the state can allow the private sector to manage strategic areas of the economy?

Time-tabling the privatisation of any sector is the prerogative of the state. People can talk of privatisation, people can raise certain questions about the need to accelerate the privatisation programme — and this is perfectly acceptable. However, when and how much privatisation we go for is a decision for the government. It is not a private decision.

The balance has been carefully weighed by the government. This *is why Egypt has not rushed into* the privatisation process like other countries. We have to distinguish between certain comments and remarks — certain aspirations in the minds of some *people on the one hand, and the* decision-making process on the other.

The Presidents' Council does not interfere in the decision-making process and never will.

What was the reason behind asking President Mubarak to head the Higher Council for Exports, of which you are a member?

The reason was to give a boost to the Council — to have a push in the decision-making process in order to solve certain problems and overcome obstacles. This was the reason we asked President Mubarak to head the Council. Unfortunately, the Council has not convened since its founding. Egypt has a very good opportunity to begin an export drive but the problems encountered by exporters over the years have not been dealt with adequately or speedily enough. First of all, in order to export, you have to produce the quantity, quality and at a cost that will enable you to export. You cannot ask Egyptian companies producing for export to start at a disadvantage. And if those industries are starting from scratch, you cannot treat them as you would an established company, placing them under heavy tax burdens and then expect them to be successful. This makes no sense at all.

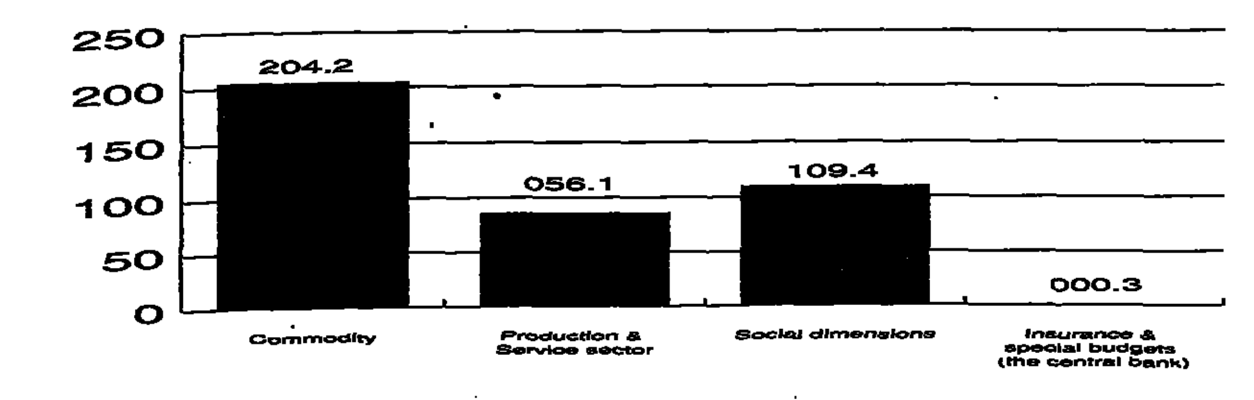
What role do you see for the private sector in the Toshki-New Valley project, characterised by some experts as over ambitious and cripplingly expensive?

Toshki was a very courageous decision by the government, very ambitious and very commendable. But then there are many details about the project which are not clear.

I would say communications are a key factor that will have an impact on the speed and ease with which the project can be implemented. This is why a *trans-Africa highway, which is one project I have* always dreamed of achieving, linking the north to the south, and the east with the west, is so important. Without a good road how can you hope to *transport production and develop communities.*

The real contribution of the private sector in Toshki will be to undertake development in the southern part of Egypt. The private sector will then be able to *join forces with foreign investors in developing the* south, and we will witness a lot of investment interest from foreign financial institutions.

Interview by ***Aziza Sami, Gamal Nkrumah*** *and* ***Nagwa El-Akkad***



Going for six per cent

Government ministers defended the budget and development plan proposals at parliamentary sessions this week. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended

The Shura Council and the People's Assembly this week began debating the state's budget and the new socio-economic development plan. Planning Minister Zafer El-Bishri told the Shura *Council that* the five-year plan aims to encourage investments. The government, he said, plans to raise the rate of economic growth from its current level of 4.5 per cent to around 6 per cent next year.

The 1997/98's *plan marks the beginning* of the new socio-economic five-year development plan (1997-2002). The five-year plan projects a total investment of LE400 billion, LE58 *billion* of which are earmarked for the first year.

The private sector, the minister added, is expected to invest LE37.4 billion, or 64.5 per cent of total investments in the year 1997/98. This, El-Bishri notes, spotlights the government's liberalisation and privatisation policies.

According to El-Bishri, the population is expected to increase from 61.8 million in 1996/97 to 63 million in 1997/98. The labour force is also expected to grow by half a million to nearly 18 *million in* 97/98. The plan, said El-Bishri, aims to create 0.7 million new jobs.

The plan aims to boost Egyptian agricultural and industrial exports by at least 10 per cent and reduce imports by 4.5 per cent. El-Bishri said that *the deficit in trade balance is expected* to edge downwards, from LE34 billion in 96/97 to LE33 billion in 97/98.

El-Bishri predicted an increase in Suez Canal revenues, the remittances of Egyptian expatriates and tourism. This, he said, will boost the balance of payment suprlus by LE1 billion, to reach LE2.8 billion in 97/98.

Addressing the People's Assembly Plan and Budget Committee, Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib said that this year's state budget aims to achieve an equitable distribution of income and help low-income groups.

The 97/98 budget involves expenditures of LE83.3 of which LE18.1 billion will be allocated to education, health, culture and social services and LE4.6 billion to food subsidies, low-cost housing and soft-term loans.

The finance minister said that the government has minimised the role of foreign borrowing in financing its development schemes.

Salah Abdou, a member of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), criticised the plan and budget for what he said was exaggerated reliance on the role of the private sector in the economy. El-Gharib, in response, stated that the public sector had failed in achieving the objectives of previous development plans. "The goverment has created a friendly environment for the private sector to play a larger role in development plans. In doing so, it has won the admiration of international financial institutions and foreign countries alike," El-Gharib said.

Asked about the proceeds of privatisation sales, El-Gharib indicated that part of these proceeds will be used in paying the debts owed by public sector companies to banks. Another part, he said will be used to compensate those employees whose companies have folded.

The finance minister pointed out that the government has earmarked LE23.5 billion to the service of the state's debts, foreign as well as domestic.

Eyes on Egypt

Participants in a seminar about the Egyptian economy commended its macro-economic performance, but said much is still lacking. **Sherine Abdel-Razek** looks into the debate

Representatives of international financial institutions, businessmen and governments have approved of Egypt's ec*onomic achievements* but urged the Egyptian government to reform its bureaucracy and boost the per*formance of each sector* of the economy individually.

A two-day conference billed "Egypt, the Emerging Market" *was attended by investors* from over 22 countries. ING Barings, Merril Lynch, the World Bank and other financial institutions were represented. Discussions focused on foreign direct investments, capital and financial markets, and the development needs of Egypt's New Valley. The conference was sponsored by the American Chamber of Commerce and 12 private sector companies.

Minister of State Atef Ebeid *promised the participants that* the government will heed their views. He referred to positive economic indicators, such as the balance of payments surplus, saying that the economic outlook is promising.

The relationship between business and government was among the conference's main themes.

Former Cypriot President George Vasilliou, who is a prominent economist and businessman, said that with *increased globalisation and* competition, the emerging markets have no time to waste. "Egypt's problem is the lack of efficiency in different sectors," Vasilliou declared, pointing out that nearly 30 per cent of businessmen's time in Egypt is wasted in dealing with the bureaucracy. It takes a year to register a foreign firm in Egypt, he added.

Vasilliou stressed the need for expanding private sector activities, but said that the way a company is run is more *crucial than* by who it is owned. The bottom line, he stated, is to upgrade efficiency. "What counts is the average overall productivity of the country and not that of a firm or another," Vasilliou said.

The president of the American Chamber of Commerce, Shafik Gabr, stated that Egypt *has achieved a lot during the* past six years. The macro-economic indicators have improved and are sustainable. Inflation is down to less than 6 per cent, from over 25 per cent in the early 1990s. Exchange rates were unified and the budget deficit has been brought under control. The capital market has been re-established and its capitalisation (the total value of shares) increased eleven-fold in four years.

With the exception of the in*ternal debt indicator, Egypt* can meet most of the Maastricht agreements criteria and qualify, so to speak, for mem*bership in the European Union*, Gabr said.

Gabr praised Egypt's strategy of gradual reform, but rec*ommended the creation of an* efficient social safety net to accompany the liberalisation process.

US ambassador to Egypt Edward Walker pointed out that the reform is not complete yet and that two problems still persist. One is the slow growth of non-traditional exports. Another is the shortage of foreign direct investments. The targeted rate of seven per cent growth cannot be achieved through domestic investments alone, Walker said.

Walker enumerated the problems encountered by American businessmen in *Egypt, such as the delay in de*livery schedules, the lack of middle managers, and the uncertainty shrouding the tax *system.*

Walker pointed out that Egypt needs a "business plan" which would pinpoint the areas *ripe for foreign in*vestment, identify potential investors and design a promotional plan for the econ*omy and its various sectors.*

Rassem Zaouk from Merril Lynch said that Egypt's reform programme is "a very interesting story." He said that the ratio of foreign exchange reserves to that of the Gross Domestic Product is one of the highest in the region and may be headed to become one of the highest in the world. Zaouk said that there is increasing interest in the Egyptian economy, especially after the high rating given Egypt by Standard and Poor's.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Africa calls

At a time when much of the world enjoys relative peace, Africa is embroiled in civil wars. And in the last few months such wars have assumed critical importance for the continent's destiny. National survival is still the number one issue on the political agenda of almost all African states. Africa must not be written off by history as a hopeless basket case. The political stability of Zaire with its tremendous natural resource base and *economic potential must be secured. Africa does not want to* witness a repetition of the tragic experience of Zaire in the early 1960s.

For Egypt, Africa matters a great deal. The countries of the Great Lakes region in eastern and central Africa are widely considered as Egypt's strategic depth. The Nile is the lifeline of Egypt, and the agricultural development projects in the south of the country and in the Sinai depend on a steady flow of water supplies from the Nile Basin. Zaire, with its 500 kilometre long border with Sudan is important to Egypt. Zaire is a Nile Basin country.

Egypt has long made it clear what it hopes its standing in Africa will be. Africa has traditionally been an important component of Egypt's foreign policy perspective. Africa was one of *the three circles that according to the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser* constituted Egypt's national identity — the two others being the Arab and the Islamic. Egypt offered political asylum for Lumumba's family. Egypt played no small part in the demise of Moise Tshombe who declared mineral-rich Katanga's secession. Today, Egypt's and Zaire's, and the entire African continent's economic and political destinies are inextricably intertwined.

A crucial question throughout, now posed with added urgency is this: how much longer can Africans suffer military dictatorships and political chaos. When it comes to democratisation in Africa, the West's views are widely considered too ambiguous or nuanced. The Zairean crisis illustrates that for Western governments "free trade" in the continent's natural resources counts *much more than Africans' human rights.*

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A better informed future

The development of information technology, and the industries it comprises, present a perfect project for inter-Arab cooperation, writes **Ibrahim Nafie**



In today's world the trend is towards integration, and the most successful organisations will be regional if not trans-regional, capable of coordinating their activities to serve the mutual interest of all their potential customers.

Given this fact a new approach towards an Arab common market has become essential. In my previous articles I have highlighted those sectors which might take the lead in consolidating Arab integration. In this article my intention is to focus on the important role that the information sector could play.

In all Arab countries information technology is an emerging sector. Abandoning any restrictions already in place is not likely, therefore, to be to the detriment of any existing national industry and therefore will not compromise any country's interests. To the contrary, cooperation will open up the possibility of rapid development throughout the Arab world.

Unlike integration in other sectors, where established national interests might have been compromised, information technology is a wide open field in which greater integration would allow Arab countries to compete more effectively in international markets and reduce dependency on foreign industries. Prospects for Arab cooperation in the field of information technology are, therefore, exceptionally promising.

The ability to manufacture hardware — computers, electronic communication devices, hard and floppy discs — and software designed for specific applications, is likely to become a powerful motor for development in Third World *countries. Information technology is, after all, a* basic prerequisite for research, the development of education systems, and has an ever growing number of practical applications.

The World Bank has repeatedly stressed the need for developing countries to enhance their information and communication systems so that they are in a position to directly access sources of information. And certainly there is a great need *to accelerate efforts in this direction, not* least in the area of tele-communications since improved telephone systems at the domestic level *are imperative in guaranteeing use-*effectiveness of information systems in any country.

Economic health is dependent, and will become increasingly so, on the availability of a continuously growing body of state-of-the-art information technology and, naturally, on the communication systems necessary for users to access information.

The possession and use of the new information technologies and communication systems can go some way, even, to outweighing the disadvantages caused by the scarcity of natural resources in buttressing economies. Countries *today can be classified according to their ability* to generate information of basic importance to their economies, and might be broken down into a league table comprising none information generating nations, nations generating extensive information, and countries which generate information through traditional means.

Of course, developing information technology is largely dependent on three industries: the production of electronic data processing systems, computers of various generations, capacities and processing speeds; the design of software and *applications and retrieval networks; and infra-*structural systems that facilitate the exchange of information on the domestic, regional and international levels.

Each of these three areas of activity enhances the others, which means that developments in one of these areas has spin-off benefits for the other two. All three fields of activity, though, will be paralysed in the absence of an efficient telephone system or the hardware necessary to link up personal computers to telephone systems capable of transmitting information at high speed.

Unfortunately, while the development and pro*duction of programmes and software for specific* applications and the ability to access global networks has advanced in a number of Arab countries, this *has* largely been at the expense of the production of communication devices, cables and automatic exchange systems. Arab countries have focused their attention on two out of the three industries, and now need to focus on the hardware aspect of the industry.

The Arab world *remains* heavily dependent on the import of high tech components from Japan, East Asia and the US. And while there are no reliable statistics concerning the size of the market for personal computers in the Arab world, experts agree that it is somewhere in the region of $600-900 million dollars, and is expanding at an annual rate of some 15 per cent.

It is, in other words, a growth market, one *which should prove attractive to* Arab investors. In addition, the demand for computers across the region is likely to be reinforced should hardware components be produced locally, a fact that would allow for far greater vertical integration.

The software industry has, as already noted, taken large strides in the Arab world. Yet despite the huge array of products now coming onto the market, software producers still tend to operate individually, which mitigates against improved marketing, patent regulation and the prevention of piracy. This in turn limits profits, and thus the amount of capital that can be reinvested in the industry.

Mention should be made of two important facts. First, there is wide scale interest in the Internet and there are efforts to establish Arab national networks to provide services to their subscribers. Such networks already exist in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, the Gulf, Tunisia and Morocco. There are also a number of endeavours to link two or more networks in order to optimise benefits. The Regional Centre for Information Technology in Egypt, which links the Egyptian and Syrian networks is an example.

The second fact to be noted is that in the context of linking Arab information networks, the Arab Regional Network for Information Technology has been established following the decision issued at a 1994 Cairo conference. The network links all parties involved in the field of *information technology,* supports software production, promotes the exchange of experience between specialists and strives to update capabilities and optimise use effectiveness. These are worthy aims and, if achieved, will represent a considerable step towards effectively integrating Arab endeavours in the field of information technology.

In defence of multipolarity

A Middle East peace process based on exclusive American sponsorship has proved a failure. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** calls for a multipolar approach to the solution of the conflict

A *struggle is currently underway between the* United states, which is trying to shape a future world based on unipolarity, and other great powers which are striving for a multipolar world order. No less real for being undeclared, the struggle has been manifesting itself more and more clearly since Clinton's reelection. His eminent Democratic predecessor Franklin D Roosevelt, who also served more than one term, scored an *outstanding victory for America in World War II;* Clinton could well be aspiring to a similar victory in the aftermath of what can be termed World War III, a war waged without a single shot being fired but which brought down the Soviet Union, not only as a state, but also as America's opposite pole in the former bipolar world order.

Clinton's attempt to foster an international climate favourable to some form of American heg*emony at the turn of a new century comes* at a time the notion of globalisation is moving to the forefront of world politics. The word itself is still ambivalent. Its implication that no particular state will enjoy a privileged position can tempt Clinton to justify his drive towards unipolarity in terms of filling a dangerous power vacuum. Whatever his reasons, the signs of Washington's bid for global leadership are many. For example, *there is the Clinton administration's insistence on* removing former UN secretary-general Boutros Ghali by a 1 to 14 vote because, despite his pragmatic acceptance of America's status as *primus inter pares*, he failed to endorse that status as expressly as Clinton would have wished. Then there is the Clinton administration's refusal to allow the condemnation of Israel, again by a 1 to 14 vote, in the Har Homa affair. This defiance of *the will of the international community* was all the more striking in that Washington resorted to the veto to protect Israel from censure in an undertaking it itself disapproved of.

France was the first great power to rebel against America's bid for exclusive global leadership, especially since Chirac became president. Paris had already stood up to Washington on the cultural clauses in the GATT negotiations. Chirac has gone further in the direction of asserting an independent French stand, notably on the Arab-Israeli conflict. He continues to uphold the principle of a sovereign Palestinian state and to support Lebanon's integrity. More, he has visited the Middle East without including Israel in his itinerary.

Europe has recently nominated its special envoy *to the Middle East, Miguel Angel Moratinos,* who was careful to assert that his role would be complementary to and not competitive with that of the United States, and that he would be exploring new avenues other than those already addressed by the Americans, such as how far civil society and not only state negotiators could contribute to the peace process. However, with America's obvious inability to overcome the *present impasse in the peace process, the* assignment of the special envoy could well end up dealing with issues lying beyond the scope of his original mandate.

The independent role of the European Union is likely to become more pronounced following the recent British elections. That is not to say that Tony Blair espouses the cause of Europe with no reservations; however, he differs from his Tory *predecessor John Major, in the attitude to Eu*ropean integration, which he regards as "an opportunity, not a threat". For a long time, Britain vacillated between its European identity and its transatlantic, Anglo-Saxon ties. New Labour is expected to resolve the issue in favour of Europe.

Actually, the challenge to America is not coming from Europe only. The recent rapprochement between China and Russia is significant in this *regard. Both nations made it clear that they* were not coming together on ideological grounds but for purely pragmatic reasons, namely, that neither is prepared to accept the unchallenged global leadership of one superpower. Russia perceives the West's insistence on extending NATO eastwards to incorporate countries that once belonged to the Warsaw Pact as an affront. After all, the West could have chosen a *new name for* an organisation that would ensure the security of a unified Europe. Despite Yeltsin's readiness to downplay reasons for friction between Russia and the West, there are limits on how far he can go in this direction. Moreover, Russia is aware of its potential as a vast market under GATT and the world globalisation process. This also applies to China, which does not hesitate to use its *economic clout to limit the West's intervention* in its internal affairs in the name of democracy and human rights.

Then there is Asia, which is also emerging as an independent pole in its own right, not only thanks to its status in the global economy, but also thanks to its mastery of the new technologies of the Information Age. The North will continue to be an arena for fierce competition between ec*onomic groupings, further exacerbated by the* deepening disparities between North and South, which have become more striking than ever with the pictures of human ordeals in the heart of Africa: Rwanda, Burundi; now, Zaire; and their likely extension to other parts of Central Africa. What of the Middle East in all this, whose faltering peace process has reached an unprecedented low?

*The American administration, which has cho*sen to assume the sponsorship of the process alone, will also have to assume responsibility for its breakdown alone. Are the Arab parties bound by Washington's self-proclaimed decision to be the sole patron of the Middle East peace process? With the gradual emergence of a multipolar world structure despite American resistance, the Arab parties can count on many friends in the *world to help challenge Netanyahu's diktats.* The real problem is whether the Arab parties are ready to take a unified stand in support of multipolarity against unipolarity, which, in the final analysis, would help preempt widespread destabilisation and enhance the chance of peace to the benefit of all concerned, including the United States.

Coffee cups and clients

By Naguib Mahfouz

While El-Fishawi, located in the heart of El-Hussein, has been *the café most* closely associated with my name, Qahwat Urabi, which once stood at the end of El-Geish Street in Abbasiya, was no less dear to me.

The café was owned by *mu'allim* Urabi, once one of the strong *men (futuwwa) of El-Husseiniya.* He opened the café after serving a sentence in prison. The café was frequented by an illustrious clientele. In his heyday, when he was in control, Urabi, like all strong men of his time, must have rendered services to prominent figures, probably during election campaigns. The *futuwwat* in any district followed their leader's orders, voting *for the candidate he supported, mustering* the votes of their families, and of anyone they could persuade by any means.

The café was well managed, and impeccably clean. There were traditions and rituals to be observed: on entering, we had to go and greet Urabi. He would majestically rise to his feet, return our greeting and invite us to enter the café. No one was allowed to sit down or order unless the ritual was fully performed. On feast days, the rich and famous could be seen placing gold pounds in the hands of the *mu'allim*'s children. The children were too young to spend the money, of course, and the gift was meant for the boss himself.

On feast days, when we performed the usual ritual, we would find Urabi sitting at *his table, eating his* feast day breakfast of broth and *fatta*. He would invariably invite us to share his meal, and we invariably thanked him, and ordered our usual dish of *fuul* or a *shisha*.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Playing with fire

Al-Gomhuria: "At a time when we are facing our traditional enemies and need to concentrate our efforts in defence of national honour, Dr Yehia Ismail, secretary-general of the Azhar Scholars Front, could only find an Egyptian professor to rant and rave against. We have gone back to the vicious circle of condemning one another without having learnt the lessons of the case against Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid. This is the same conduct as that adopted by the terrorist groups which declare that Egyptian society is infidel, including Al-Azhar and all its personnel. Are all these bloody lessons not sufficient to warn us not to play with fire and brand people as apostates?"
(Saad Hagrass, 8 May)

Al-Akhbar: "It was only natural that the international media should attach great importance to the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Vilayati to Egypt at a time when the peace process is blocked by Israeli aggression against Islamic holy places. The visit is a good move and it is hoped that it will bring about an improvement in relations between Egypt and Iran. Vilayati's visit does not reflect a change in Egypt's set policy but underlines Egypt's position of maintaining good relations with all countries on the basis of mutual interests and refraining from actions that threaten national interests."
(Galal Dwidar, 9 May)

Al-Mussawar: "I am amazed at the People's Assembly members who attack the press and ask that it should be muzzled. They behave as though the press were responsible for all of Egypt's ills. Recently, these members were *determined* to pass a law *that would limit* press freedom. They would have gotten away with it had it not been for the president of the republic. I say to the respectable parliament members: it is not in your interest to wage war against the press because it is Egypt's best ambassador. Attempts to muzzle the press would have the opposite effect from the one sought because the press would then look into cases of forgery and intimidation in connection with your parliamentary elections."
(Mahmoud El-Saadany, 9May)

Al-Wafd: "The People's Assembly members are at present very angry with the press because it criticises them and exposes their *violations* of the *statutes. The latest* criticism is that sessions are held without the required quorum being present. What else can be expected of representatives who acquired their positions through forgery, thuggery and the use of votes of citizens abroad, dead or in prison?"
(Talaat Maghawry, 11 May)

Al-Ahram: "The history of Egyptian-Iranian relations is one of enmity — on the part of Iran — that has spanned more than two decades. This enmity can end at any time bearing in mind that this should come from the Iranian side. But how can the two be reconciled when there is a chasm of differences between the objectives of Egypt and those of revolutionary Iran? We cannot ignore that there is a certain amount of deception on the Iranian side. *Therefore,* Vilayati's *visit to Cairo can only* be regarded as a "visit" and nothing more, and his invitation to President Mubarak to attend the Islamic summit in Tehran next December can only be regarded as an "invitation" to be accepted or turned down and nothing more."
(Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, 11 May)

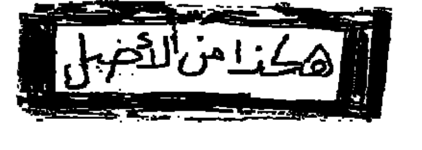
Al-Arabi: "It is reasonable for a political trend to commit a mistake once every year but we as an Islamic trend seem bent on committing a *mistake* every day. We raise unnecessary issues, enter into battles without good cause and place ourselves on the defensive unnecessarily. The case of Dr Hassan Hanafi is our latest mistake. Personally, I would like to urge Dr Hassan Hanafi to continue *discussing social* issues from an enlightened Muslim point of view. But I would like to say that Dr Yehia Ismail has the right, like others, to agree or disagree with Dr Hassan Hanafi without seeking to intimidate anyone."
(Mohamed Moro, 12 May)

Rose El-Youssef: "Nearly 20 years ago, Al-Azhar student Mohamed Salem Rahhal formed an extremist organisation. At the time, the security agencies belittled his role and expelled him from Egypt in order to protect Al-Azhar from the accusation that its ranks had been infiltrated by extremists. Now, some sheikhs have sought to be more intelligent than Rahhal and have turned *Al-Azhar into a bastion* of *intellectual* and religious intimidation, branding whomsoever they please as apostates. The case of declaring Dr Hassan Hanafi an apostate can only cause dissension and division in the official religious institutions."
(Wael El-Ibrachi, 12 May)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



From inside the bullet-proof car, passing through millions of Lebanese Muslims and Christians, a white face appears. The mitre is white too, as are his clothes, while his pink smile spreads to the rest of his face. Although his eyes are hidden beneath his eyebrows and his cheeks are flattened, the joy of peace looks out over the world through the eyes of Pope John Paul II. His wide smile heals old wounds, and wipes away the blood shed in Lebanon and throughout the world.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Hoist by their own petard

Egypt's intellectual and cultural life has been thrown into turmoil twice recently, both times through misunderstanding and malice. In a whirlwind of confusion and fanaticism, freedom of thought came under especially heavy fire. Issues of importance were discarded and backwardness, isolation and intellectual stagnation reared their ugly heads.

Although the two upheavals may have had different causes, both stem from the same pattern of thinking, which encourages stagnation, eliminates the possibility of dialogue, and imposes a monolithic world-view. If the issues at stake relate to religion or philosophy, dissenters — or even those who dare to question dominant ideas — are considered *infidels*. If the issues relate to the body politic or the nation, however, those who disagree with the hegemonic discourse are threatened with expulsion, deprivation and ostracisation.

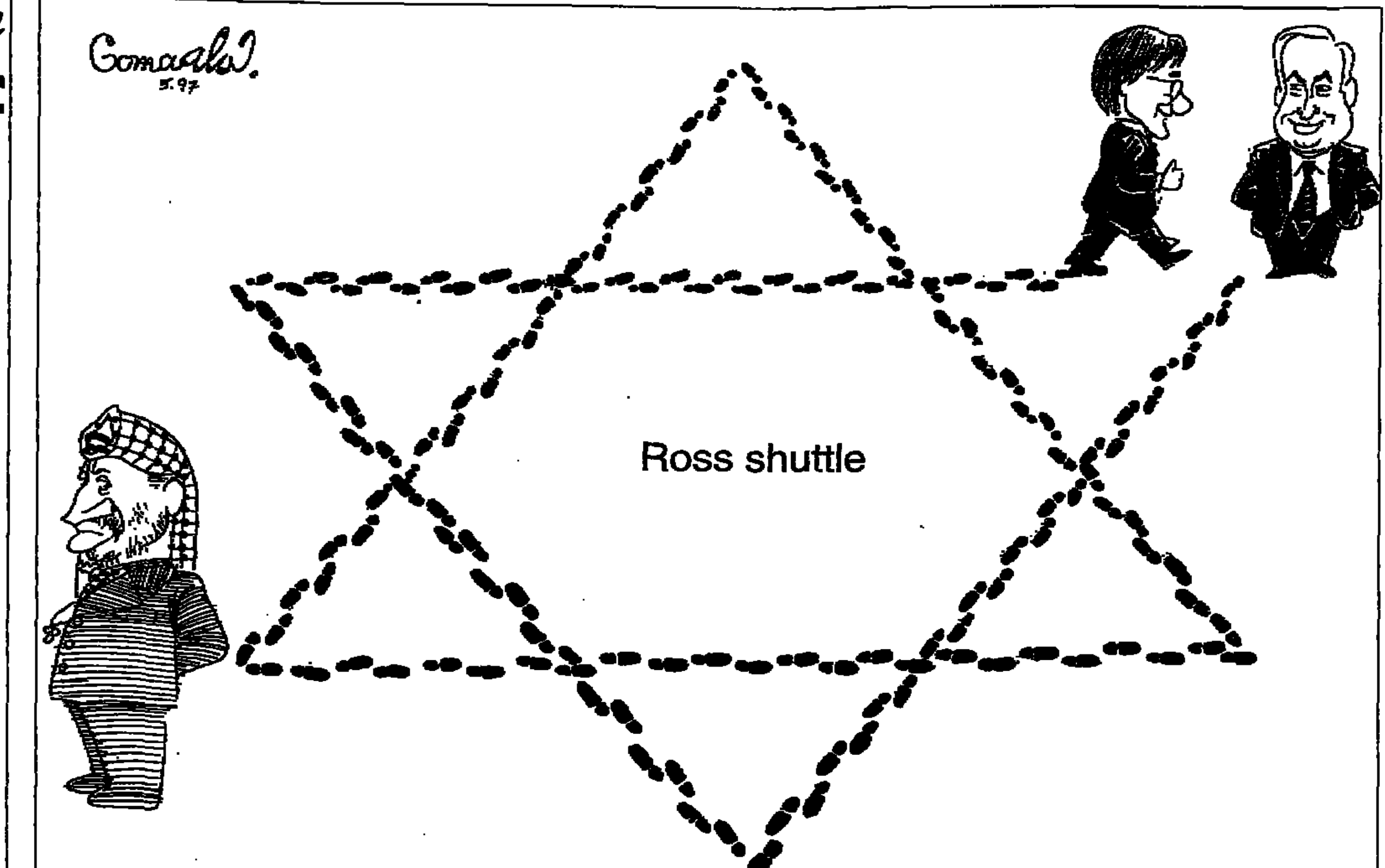
The first upheaval, the consequences of which remain a cause for concern, was precipitated by the Al-Azhar Scholars' Front *when it* attacked Dr Hassan Hanafi, professor of philosophy and an eminent scholar who has made *many original contributions* to the field of Islamic thought. The attack is almost reminiscent of the fierce battle launched against Dr Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, which led to a judicial decision ruling that he was an apostate. This ruling represents a permanent stain in the history of Islamic thought, and will continue to provide a dangerous precedent for restrictions on freedom of thought and expression in Egypt in general.

The story begins, in every case, with a lecture or article which presents an open-minded or otherwise *unconventional perspective* on a topic in a field which, whether by consensus or lack of interest, had been until then strictly reserved to a group of specialists who supposedly enjoy a monopoly on knowledge. Once the new ideas are published in the press, the anger of the government, Al-Azhar, religious leaders and the public at large (none of whom have anything to do with the specific issue), is ignited, and the controversy departs the *realm of* science, turning into a free-for-all: in an orgy of self-righteousness, everyone indulges in accusations of atheism or apostasy, efforts to restrict personal freedoms, book-burning and expulsion from various institutions.

One would think that the Al-Azhar Scholars' Front had better things to do. It could, for instance, devote its efforts to resisting the campaign launched by the West to undermine Islam, or send its representatives to any of the scores of conferences held in Europe and the US to discuss Islam and explain its principles, its laws, civilisation and history. Instead, the Front's members spend their time ambushing intellectual works by scholars who have devoted themselves to *defending* Islamic thought and civilisation.

The same goes for other institutions. Another example of the general trend was the storm at the Writers' Union, which called for the expulsion of pro-normalisation members. There has been much talk about committees established to interrogate writers who seemed to approve a dialogue *with* Israel. These writers may now face corrective action, or even be expelled from the Union.

Although I was one of the first to criticise the Copenhagen meeting, I am also one of the *first* to condemn charges of treason or dissidence brought against those with whom I differ politically, *whether* over the conflict or dialogue with Israel. The Writers' Union is supposed to *be one* of the guardians of crucial freedoms: the freedom to publish, freedom of expression and *thought*. It is certainly not required to impose a McCarthy-style pattern of thought, establish *interrogation* committees or organise an inquisition. If the Writers' Union persists in its attitude, *it* will be tying the rope around its own neck and those of its members.



Soapbox

A neo-rational scapegoat

Hassan Hanafi, Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid and Mohamed Abed El-Jabri, among others, are attempting to revive rationalism, or to establish a contemporary rationalist movement which would view religion as a symbolic expression of truth, the same truth expressed through science, art and philosophy.

Science, art and philosophy are only means of grasping and expressing facts about our universe. Means of perception vary, as do means of expression or languages. The religious language is a symbolic language comprehended by all mankind, while only a few understand the language specific to philosophy, *science and art*.

A philosopher can interpret religious texts rationally and philosophically. Through interpretation, the philosopher can find religion in science and science in religion. The philosopher, therefore, inevitably comes into conflict with religious authority.

The clergy derives its legitimacy and authority from a deeply-rooted heritage. It considers any threat to this power a form of corruption which must be eliminated. Acknowledging any degree of interpretation implies recognition of the law of change. Religious authority relies on the "transmission" of correct practice (*sunna*), and denounces *interpretation*, which it condemns as heresy. New ideas may always lead to the transformation of the religious establishment.

There are grounds to believe that the entire Hassan Hanafi case was designed by Mustafa Mashhour's followers within Al-Azhar to draw attention away from Mashhour's statements on Copts. Hassan *Hanafi is only a scapegoat.*



This week's soapbox speaker is a poet, columnist at Al-Ahram *and editor-in-chief of the literary magazine* Ibdaa.

Ahmed Abdel-Mo'ti Hegazi

Sleeping with the enemy

Islamism in Algeria and Turkey have two very different lessons to teach, writes **Eqbal Ahmad**. But both demonstrate the extent to which Islamism is an exercise in power, not in morality. Ideology is incidental

Algeria and Turkey present contrasting examples of 'Islamism' in action. In Turkey, which has been a secular state since 1923, when Mustapha Kemal Ataturk founded the republic *on the ruins of the Ottomon* Empire, the Islamists now head an elected government, with Rafah (Welfare) Party leader Necmettin Erbakan as prime minister. In Algeria, where Islam enjoys constitutional assignation as the state religion, the Front Islamique du Salut (Islamic Salvation Front) and its more militant splinters are engaged in a brutal war with the state and, increasingly, large sections of Algerian Muslim society. This apparent contrast reveals a great deal about the nature of Islamism in our time and also of most contemporary Muslim states. But first some background.

The term Islamism has now replaced the less accurate 'fundamentalism' to describe the political movements that seek power professedly as a means to Islamise state and society. Contemporary Islamism shares common features throughout the Muslim world. It claims to emulate the model of Islamic state established by the prophet and the first four "rightly guided" (*rashidun*) caliphs. It draws selectively on the writings of medieval Muslim theologians such as El-*Ghazali* and *Ibn* Taymiyya. *Its most influential* contemporary theoreticians are a select group of scholars — Hassan El-Banna, Abdel-Qader and Sayed Qutub of Egypt, Maulana Syed Abul Ala Maudoodi of Paki*stan and, more recently, Ayatullah Khomeini of Iran* are prominent among them. The discourse and organisational model of its various country-based parties have been largely shaped by the example of the Ikhwan Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt and Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan. Since 1979, the Islamic revolution and seizure of state power by clerics in Iran has provided inspiration and encouragement to mainstream Islamic parties. Funding from official and unofficial sources, especially the Gulf states and Muslim migrants in Europe and America, have also greatly augmented the material resources of Islamic parties and facilitated frequent transnational contacts and dialogue among them.

During the years 1980 to '90, Islamic militancy acquired an armed, pan-Islamic dimension with generous assistance from an unlikely source — the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America. The context of this unexpected development was the 1979 leftist coup d'état in Afghanistan, and Soviet intervention there in support of the communist regime, which *confronted an Islamic Jihad directed from* Pakistan. Afghanistan's was a popular Islamist cause. For the United States, locked in a protracted struggle against the "evil empire", the temptation to mobilise Islam against communism was too great to resist. As America's awesome Cold War national security apparatus got into *jihad* gear, volunteers from all over the Muslim world poured into Pakistan and Afghanistan. They would return home with revolutionary motivations and experience in terrorism and *guerrilla warfare. Many of these young militants* found the old Islamic Party formations too cautious for their taste, and instead swelled the ranks of the more militant, armed groupings such as El-Gama'a El-Islamiya and El-Jihad in Egypt, the Groupe Armé Islamique in Algeria, and El-Jihad El-Islami in Occupied Palestine. Most of the well-publicised terrorist violence in Algeria, Palestine/Israel, and Egypt are ascribed to these groups, a fact rarely mentioned in the US media although it offers important lessons on the costs of covert operations abroad.

There are invariably a few local variations in the programmes of the Islamist parties, but by and large they are remarkably similar. First, there is the core commitment to a comprehensive and strict enforcement of immutable Islamic laws, the *Shar'ia*. Second, there is insistence on observance of such practices as prohibition of alcohol, separation of sexes and, for women, the wearing of *hijab*. Third, rights of citizens are to be defined in terms of their religious and sexual identity — Muslim/non-Muslim, male/female. Four, there *is a* rejection of Western influence in *the* cultural life of Muslim societies and the promise of Islamising education, television, cinema etc.

A certain variation and flexibility exists in this re*gard, both in space and time. The Afghan Taliban* have banned music as well as most sports. In Iran, sports were always favoured, and the scope of musicality has been gradually expanding.

Five, much stock is put on solidarity with the *Umma*, the ensemble of Muslim communities the world over. An aspect of this solidarity is the presumption that an Islamic party or government shall not align with alien, especially Western, governments to the detriment of a Muslim country or community.

Six, there is an uncompromising posture of opposition to Israel as an aggressive, alien entity forcibly implanted in the heart of the Muslim world. Nearly all Islamist movements have at one time or another mobilised public support against Israel's occupation and the tightening of the Zionist hold on Jerusalem, including the areas surrounding the sacred site of El-*Haram El-Sharif*.

Both Islamic groupings of our immediate concern — Algeria's Salvation Front and Turkey's Rafah — subscribe to these points. The Salvation Front, which *is out of power and at war with Algeria's military* dominated government, remains dedicated to the programme outlined above. By contrast, Turkey's Islamists are leading the government. There, a remarkable split appears to have occurred between norm and praxis. It is instructive to compare the past professions and present practices of Professor Necmettin Erbakan, leader of the Welfare Party and currently the head of the Turkish government.

The party, then called the Salvation Party, attracted *international attention in September* 1980 *when it* organised an impressive political rally in Konya, to "Save Jerusalem". Demonstrators carried green flags and shouted slogans calling for an Islamic state. The event caused much consternation among Turkey's secularists. It also contributed to the dissolution of parliament by the army, the institution of military rule, a ban on political parties, and the arrest and trial of Mr Erbakan — promptly hailed by supporters as *Mujahid* Erbakan — for attempting to subvert the secular state and to replace it with an Islamic one.

Turkey's pro-Western military leaders had other reasons to be apprehensive. The Islamists also opposed Turkey's entry into the European Union, proposed to create an Islamic Common Market, and advocated the severance of Ankara's diplomatic relations with Israel. The emergence of this movement in the one bastion of Jacobin secularism in the Muslim world was a cause of much rejoicing among Islamists, and at least equally great anxiety in the West. But political repression rarely works. It took 16 years of persistent political work for the Welfare Party *to lead an elected* government in Turkey.

With the powerful military establishment sitting astride it, Turkey's Islamist mountain has produced a *great number of secular, pro-American, and pro-*Israeli mice. The count is dizzying indeed. We mention only a few. A strategic alliance involving close collaboration between Israeli and Turkish defence forces was initiated a few months before the Welfare Party came into office (see "*Return of the 'northern tier'*", 14 July 1996). Since the party's assumption of government, this alliance has been systematically advanced and consolidated with the cooperation of Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan and his colleagues.

In case there be any doubt left about his complicity in forging an alliance between Turkey and the colonisers of Jerusalem, Mr Erbakan personally met in Ankara with David Levy, Israel's foreign minister. Note that Levy is not an Israeli dove; among other expansionist dedications, he is militantly committed to "eternal" Zionist occupation of Jerusalem. Nor is Is*rael's strategic mission fraternal in* regard to *the Umma*, with which the Welfare Party professes solidarity. Rather, its intent — as shown in multiple, daily deeds — are aggressive, expansionist and dom*ineering*.

Necmettin Erbakan's meeting with David Levy was only the reflection of two larger realities: the Islamist government's systematic surrender to the exegesis of power, and the consequent augmentation of the army's role in Turkish politics. The military, of which the role and influence in politics had been declining since the restoration of democratic government in 1983, was apparently quick to sense the Welfare Party leaders' attachment to office. They proceeded to con*front its* leaders with *stark choices* between holding power and keeping their principles. An opportunity occurred on 4 February in Ercan, a suburb of Ankara. Its Islamist mayor held a rally to protest Israeli encroachments in East Jerusalem. The army moved in and arrested the mayor, charging him with "disturbing the public order". Erbakan temporised, swallowing the humiliation.

Other indignities followed — a demand that government enforce 20 measures to "preserve the state's secular character" included prohibiting government officials from "engaging in Islamic propaganda" on radio and television and refrain from building mosques in downtown Istanbul and Ankara. The prime minister balked at first, arguing constitutional rights and government prerogative. But then he gave in — paying homage to the "great Ataturk", forbidding criticism of NATO, and advocating a "tolerant secularism" similar to those of France and the United States.

Yet Turkey's military establishment appears fool*ishly determined to push the Islamists over the brink*. Its demand that the government close down the Qur'anic schools, which predate Mr Erbakan's government and where more than 5,000 students are en*rolled, may prove the last straw on the Islamists back*. Erbakan's government may not survive. But Prime Minister Erbakan's official reception of David Levy was a mere climax of his party's and government's capacity for antagonistic collaboration. It is unlikely that his government will survive, but the damage is done. The point has been made.

Islamism in Turkey, as elsewhere, is an instrument of power. It is not the ideological imperative it appears. Ideology is not unimportant to it, merely it is not central. Its primary commitment is more to attain office than to establish a moral order. Its leaders are mostly among those who are marginalised by closed ruling circles, and the cadres are often the men and women who are denied social mobility — people who live, even when they are engineers and physicians, culturally on the non-Westernised and *under-privileged side of the social apartheid* that prevails in our societies. Access to power, status, and opportunity are among their primary needs. When these are available they grab them and, to keep *them, they make compromises, as did the Jamaat-i-*Islami in the days of Mohamed Zia-ul-Haq, or the Maulanas of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Islam in coalescing with Benazir Bhutto. The corrupt and power-hungry Algerian military establishment did not get the point. But they are another story, of a very tragic kind.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

A byte worse than his bark

The Arab and Palestinian protagonists of the current peace process — with Oslo at its heart — reply to its critics with a forked tongue, and their ability to do so has been their greatest strength, at least on the ideological level. Their real source of strength, of course, lies outside the realm of thought, "on the ground", in the sordid reality of unbearable yet overpowering oppression, from which there seems to be no escape, and for which there are apparently no alternatives.

And it is with reference to this reality that the process-protagonists' collective tongue divides sharply. Along one bifurcation, you get pure ideology, or, in more contemporary jargon, virtual reality. It is here that you enter the sanitised world of the peace process. Browsing bilateral and multilateral tracks you come across breakthroughs, negotiations starting, stalling, resuming, stalling again — the process is a thing-in-itself, generating its own lopsided morality, with no reference other than to itself — you meet up with the fearful prospect of the dreaded terrorists and *the* suicide-bombers, then bask in the glory of the peace-makers, their historic handshakes, emotive speeches and Nobel Peace Prize-receiving ceremonies.

In the virtual reality of the peace process, you seriously debate such things as land-for-peace as opposed to peace-for-peace, etc., sing endless ballads in praise of "the virtues dialogue", swear undying de*votion to the* negotiating table, emphatically assert such things as "the text and spirit" of UN resolutions, Madrid, Oslo I and Oslo II, heatedly argue over "interim" and "final status" agreements, issue dire warnings *over* "*prejudicial*" acts, while bending over backwards to provide new and innovative ways to try and satisfy Israel's insatiable "security concerns".

In the world of virtual reality, time and space are to*tally distorted* and, hence, Oslo and the current peace process could lead to Palestinian self-determination and full, sovereign statehood, peace and justice in the Middle East, a new Middle East — massacres, land confiscations, and settlements notwithstanding.

But however fantastic the last statement may seem to anyone on this side of the real world-virtual reality barrier, the latter is not fantasy land. On the contrary, the process-protagonists, with complete self-assurance, describe themselves first and foremost as realists, and contemptuously accuse their critics of being utopian, retrograde, prisoners of the past, of hackneyed and tired ideologies, etc. A reference to the real world is a must, therefore, and the principal mechanism of transforming the real world into a virtual reality is de-contextualisation.

It works something like this: selectively appropriate certain facets of contemporary or past reality, dislocate them from their position both in real history and in any real order of causality. For instance, you can hail Oslo as a triumph of the struggle of the PLO and the Intifada, disregarding "details" such as the fact that the Intifada died down out of sheer exhaustion and monstrous repression well before Abu Mazen, Beilin and co. departed for their Norwegian retreat. At the time, the PLO had long been thrown out of its last "confrontation" enclave — in *north* Lebanon, incidentally; its headquarters in Tunis and armed forces were then "strategically" placed in Yemen and Sudan. These are details which some would consider essential, not just in terms of real history, but of causality.

The next step is to simplify and schematise, often to the point of banality (for example, you can suggest that Sinai was returned to Egypt as a result of "dialogue"), preferably in the form of catchy formulas, easy to memorise and regurgitate (peace process, land-for-peace), and finally sprinkle a number of key words and images (Islamic terrorists, peace-makers, anti-peace camp, Jewish blood).

Above all, however, the virtually real world of the peace process depends on a most ruthless denial of memory; lived experience is contemptuously dismissed and history destroyed wholesale. I suggested in an earlier article that the post-June War period, taken as a whole, may well be described as the peace processing years. The way in which this stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict has virtually obliterated all that preceded it, consigning it to a twilight zone of pre-history, will never cease to amaze me.

In what is tantamount to "a new testament of Palestinian and Arab history according to Security Council Resolution 242", the founding massacres of the state of Israel, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, its physical obliteration, some 4,000 towns and villages literally erased from the map, the tripartite aggression of 1956... — these and many other "events" are effectively made to disappear. Denied any explanatory bearing on the present, they maintain, at best, a remote archaeological interest.

More amazing still is that this kind of wholesale dismantling of history is not reserved to the fairly distant past. The most cursory glance at the pronouncements of Arab and Palestinian officials, media and intellectuals during the past couple of decades reveals an astounding amnesia that seems to recur on virtually a daily basis. Yesterdays are wiped out practically with every new dawn. Major events, sworn commitments, declared strategies seem to have magical qualities, continually performing the most amazing feats of disappearance.

Indeed, I very much suspect that Jebel Abu Ghneim is now about due, with a lot of help from Mr Ross, for yet another of these "now you see it, now you don't" enthralling acts of magic.

Much more straightforward is the second bifurcation along which the process protagonists' tongues divide. Nothing elaborate here, for all that is involved is an admission of overwhelming defeat. "What is the alternative?" This is the protagonists' great debate-stopper. After all, critics of Oslo and the current peace process, the most notable of whom has been Edward Said, have decisively laid bare the mechanisms of the process I have just outlined, a hundred times over, yet it keeps reappearing, not just on CNN or among a Western audience, where both ideological suppliers and consumers have a stake in believing it, but in our very midst, flaunting our daily, lived experience. Its ability to do so is not because it is real, or convincing; each and every new development disproves, rather than confirms it. Rather, no sooner is the whole ideological edifice thrown to the ground — by Qana, Netanyahu's electoral triumph, Jebel Abu Ghneim, and the like — than it derives renewed vigour from the very ground on which it has lain, for a moment, prostrate. This is simply because, on the ground, the same developments that seem to shatter the world of virtual reality, in fact re-affirm the reality of defeat, of overwhelming Israeli supremacy.

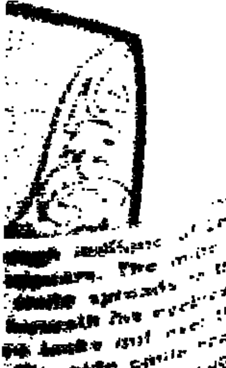
To clearly and blatantly express this, and to suggest openly and without mincing words that there is no alternative to "submission", is, however, too shameful for most of the protagonists to admit, even to themselves. And so the wheel keeps turning: touch base with profane reality, then immediately leap back into the sublime realm of idealised fantasy.

Ultimately, Quisling ideology is as old as humanity itself. We've always had Buthelezis, but thankfully humanity has managed, often with tremendous difficulty, to produce its fare share of Nelson Mandelas.









Exit another unsung hero

Nehad Selaiha remembers Salama Hassan, a leading director in regional theatre, who died last month

The National was packed though it was a Wednesday, the theatre's day off. Some of the faces I knew very well, and the rest were all vaguely familiar. They belonged to people I had met at different times during my trips to various regional theatrical pockets up and down the country. Most of them have never had the chance to tread the boards of the National (and, perhaps, never will); and for some it was the first time they had ever set foot inside that venerable building. Some brought along their wives and children, and somehow, the presence of children among so many sad grown-ups made the sadness more bearable. The shock and bitterness I had felt upon hearing of the untimely death of Salama Hassan at the age of 52, just as he was becoming recognised as one of the leading directors and shaping forces in regional theatre, had not abated; but as I shook hands with the poet Fouad Hajaj, Hassan's closest friend and life-long comrade and ally, my rage against the unfairness of life suddenly evaporated, giving way to a warm, comforting sense of continuity, of human solidarity, and to renewed faith in the value of what such known theatre-fighters like Hassan have done and will continue to do to bring theatre to the poor and culturally deprived masses all over the Nile Valley.

The occasion had the air of a family reunion, a celebration: people had gathered not to mourn but to remember and pay tribute to the heroic struggle of a courageous, self-made man who had let neither illness nor poverty stand in the way of his talent. The story of that struggle was told from the stage that evening in a series of biographical, dramatic sketches written by Fouad Hajaj and directed by Abbas Ahmed, another close friend and associate of Hassan's and a veteran fighter in the cause of regional theatre. As it unfolded, many of those present could recognise themselves in that story.

Hassan's background was remarkably inauspicious and his childhood was particularly harsh and deprived. He came into the world on 25 December, 1945 with no social or economic advantages whatsoever: his father was a poor field hand in a tiny, insignificant village called Shober in the middle of the Delta, and the atmosphere in the humble household was marred from his birth by constant domestic strife. When Hassan was six his parents broke up and the father moved to another village in another governorate where he settled down, found work and remarried. Two years later Hassan was forced to leave his home, his mother and the village school (where he had spent only a year and a half) to join his father in Bahteem. There, his new life took on a shape closely resembling that of a typical Dickensian boy-hero. He never went back to school and his father and step-mother put him to work in a factory for making matches where he stayed for the next six years.

The dangerous work, the long hours and the unhealthy conditions soon took their toll on the boy's health. It was during those years that he, like millions of other Egyptians, contracted bilharzia — that endemic Egyptian curse that has claimed the lives of a long line of Egyptian writers, scholars, intellectuals and artists, including the singer Abdel-Halim Hafez.


Salama Hassan

The chances of someone in Hassan's situation then getting properly cured were very slim. He got the treatment available to the poor and the result was that the schistosomes or flukes continued to eat into his liver until they caused his death last month. The cancer and terrible headaches he suffered from during the last 12 years of his life were also part of the legacy of those early years. But those long grim and drab years at the match factory were not without moments of hope and comfort. It was during that period that Hassan discovered the magic of acting through the movies and developed an overpowering passion for it. This sparked off a long process of self-education which started at the age of 14 and continued until the last day of his life.

The break came when he left the match factory to join the work force of a large textile company and could find the time to attend the literacy classes available at the branch of the National Union (*Al-Ittihad Al-Qawmi*) in Bahteem. Soon, he was a voracious reader, devouring books on all aspects of theatre, and when he felt he was ready, he formed a theatre troupe out of the company's workers and set about directing his first play. When the textile company suddenly withdrew its support for the project (either because it, or the chosen play, was too daring), and closed the rehearsal area, Hassan was not discouraged. He announced that his group would compete in the national youth centres' theatre contest, and found a sympathetic headmaster who agreed to host the production in his school.

The costs of the production were paid out of the pockets of the group who also constructed the stage (with a bedsheet for a curtain) while the rehearsals took place at Hassan's home. The troupe survived and thrived against great odds and performed five more plays over the next eight years, and all the time its leader and members were doing their eight-hour work shift at the factory each day and spending most of their earnings on their productions. Indeed, one evening (23 May 1977), a member of the group called Hassan Uqda sold the gold bracelets of his wife (kept for a rainy day) when the company ran short of money and could not pay for the Bahteem movie house they had rented for three nights.

From this modest, but brave beginning in Bahteem, Salama Hassan went on to direct more than 24 productions in various cultural palaces, homes and centres all over the country (winning several regional prizes), set up and train many amateur theatre groups, and establish for himself a reputation not only as an artist of great integrity and a gifted, hardworking director, but also as a man of great strength and determination and as a gentle, affectionate, warm and unassuming human being. The evening held in his memory by his friends, students and admirers last Wednesday at the National, together with the small commemorative book about his life and work issued by the Cultural Palaces Organisation were fitting tributes not only to Salama Hassan, but to all the unknown soldiers and forgotten heroes of the regional theatre, to that army of men and women who work so hard and give so much in return for so little in terms of fame, wealth, and critical recognition.

Twinkle twinkle little bat

David Blake learns how to bite white necks and apricots

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra; violin, Yasser El-Sirafi; conductor, Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Small Hall, 8 May
Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Brahms 10; violin, Christian Altenburger; cello, Franz Bartolomey; conductor, Ahmed El-Saedi; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 3 May

As well as Count Dracula, these two concerts had a couple of other shady visitors, Dr Miracle from Offenbach's *Tales of Hofmann* and Eisenstein out of Johann Strauss' *Der Fledermaus*. From the lofty heights of Brahms to some dark corners of the misery of big city life, we moved fast on black velvet wings.

Pride of place, however, went naturally to the great vampire himself. Be careful who nips your neck when he's around because he was certainly around for the opening number of the El-Saedi weekly concert of 8 May. This, Kurt Schwertsik's music, is remarkable. He is Viennese. The music itself is exact and softly frightful, fitting almost into a world of Edgar Allen Poe and something very 1997 — New York gothic. Have you ever seen a large fruit bat unwind itself from a hanging position into a strange black mass of vermin-infested limbs on the ground, shake itself and then make for the entrance light of its sheltering cave then — swoop — take off into the night? Bats are powerful — they could fly to the moon for the taste of a ripe apricot or, in Dracula's case, for a luscious human throat to bite. And bats have incisors sharp enough to slice through wood.

The Count's presence in this extraordinary work is more felt than seen, for Schwertsik is an atmospheric composer. This music is a shiver. Its surface is beautiful: alluring, softly and perniciously soliciting like a disguised deadly poison. For *Dracula the taste of* human blood far surpasses a ripe stone fruit. It's blood not peaches for him.

Schwertsik (b.1935) became world-famous when, after years of research and composing, he gave the music world the complete last act of Alban Berg's *masterpiece*, the opera *Lulu*. The immense labour of this devotion rather overshadowed Schwertsik's own compositions which are remarkable — chamber music, orchestral, electronic and an opera, *Der Lange Weg*, written between 1971 to '75.


Kurt Schwertsik's vampires — let loose at Cairo Opera House

These Dracula pieces were written in the '70s. He is a famous horn player and with his friend, the composer Friederich Cerha, founded what is probably the finest chamber ensemble for playing contemporary music, Die Reihe. The Dracula pieces are short, noticeably so, because they invite time for lengthy listening to their many beauties. There are four sections. *In* the first, Day Song, something stirs. Serenade, something is thinking, the music dark and flashing, always pianissimo and shocking. Daybreak, a lullaby of a lost forgotten night. The day is not wanted. Sunset, and definitely a ball is taking place in a great room, everything *darting and sparkling*, with black eyes beneath every lid.

Something flashes past — a rivetting presence wearing real Colombian emeralds on a heavy white neck. The music stops. Without so much as a fang visible, the Count arrives.

After this breathless encounter the Schubert Rondo in A-major for Violin and String Orchestra, with Yasser El-Sirafi, was fiddling among the seraphs. El-Sirafi and the Egyptian Chamber Orchestra had to change their tune. There was no blood around for Schubert. Everything was golden and flowing. Schubert's music flows and — air *or water — suggests that no matter* how unbalanced or tragic the earth is beautiful and will flow on like this forever.

The last offering of this concert — *Verklaerte Nacht* op 4 of Arnold Schonberg — was the most important. What did the first audiences think of this symphonic poem. *In 1895 they* mostly walked out. But vilification often reaps a rich reward and so savage was the opposition to this music that it became sanctified. It deserves its holy stature, and now calmly sits at the top of the music of the last century.

As a quietly withdrawn drama of what used to be called interior states it has blossomed into ballet, becoming one of the century's greatest. It has moved more than mountains, an unsurpassed projection of both the soul and sex. It tells of a man and a woman, in love, walking through a forest. She tells him she is pregnant by an*other man. There is some disturbance* in the smooth flowing music, which comes to rest as he tells her their mutual love will make the child their own. Schonberg was the sorcerer who opened the gates onto new vistas of the 20th century.

The Brahms mortuary festivities continued with a tenth concert. It was a splendid effort. It began with the *Tragic Overture*, op 86. Yet as it moves along in solemn style, arching and falling into some of Brahms' most elusive tunes, it does not sound quite so tragic. It seems, if anything, affirmative, and has little of the mystery in which this composer dealt. It keeps to the point and there are no hymnal sections to set the listener wondering just what it is that Brahms is being tragic about.

Brahms, unlike most other great composers, has seemingly solidified into a single musical personality. Beethoven forever alters himself, hydra headed. Brahms does not. He seems the same person in op 2 and op 48, a result, perhaps, of the fact that he never clarifies his powers or his inventions. He has no theatrical gift. In theatre you must take a position and Brahms never did.

After the *overture* came the *Double Concerto in A minor for Violin, Cello and Orchestra op 102*, with soloists Franz Bartolomey and Christian Altenburger. This music often sounds staid and conventional, though not tonight. The orchestra in these two concerts managed honesty. They were neither slow nor ponderous, nor did they display a propensity to cover themselves in sheer noise.

The evening had an air of possession about it. Maybe the Austrian visitors were guilty of overstimulating the ensemble. From their first appearance the concerto moved off savagely, and with total concentration. The soloists had a quality of total authority, devoid of pomposity. They had a physical aspect without great player histrionics. Their energy helped put the music first. From the opening cords on they never looked back. The players positively jabbed at the orchestra, fulfilling both the demands of soloists and ensemble players. The size and scale of the music was majestic, making of their appearance an auspicious event. The three movements were performed at terrific speed. The work has dark sounding areas into which orchestra and soloists plunged headlong.

Later, as the 4th Symphony of Brahms began, the visitors appeared to have bequeathed their personality to the orchestra. El-Saedi positively bashed into the music, without paying much attention to what the big, sad oceanic thing was about. And so it went on. El-Saedi has done wonderful fourths before, catching most of the floating things Brahms leaves strewn across the surface. Tonight, however, the command seemed to be just keep going.

Movement by movement went cracking along like a broken stained glass window. But this was no cathedral in ruins. It was more like the bombardment itself. War had come, instead of meditation *and rumination*. Active, certainly, this splitting and cracking of a wonderful object. Maybe it was Venetian glass that was being broken, or a happening in a Balkan war. Whatever, it was noisy and destructive.

What had happened? Maybe Dracula had taken a bite out of something other than white necks and apricots.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Nazih Rashid (Wooden Sculptures)
Doula Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Borg El-Atebu', Bab El-Louk. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc Fri, 12pm-9pm. Until 15 May

The Architecture of Old Cairo
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 17 May.

Ethnic Inspirations
Ethno Gallery, 38 Road 6, Maadi. Tel 350 6473. Daily 10am-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 19 May.

Selim (Oil on Paper)
Akhnaton Gallery, 4a & 4b, Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 22 May.
Works under the title "On Music and Musicians", "On Body and Nudes" and "On Signs and Symbols".

Pino Pandolfini (Mixed Media)
Centre of Arts, El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Until 22 May.
Works under the title "Gods and Heroes of the Mediterranean".

Romano Della Chiesa (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-8pm. Until 22 May.

Elfi Fröhlich (Photographs)
Museum of Contemporary Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 24 May.
Works under the title "Staging of Authenticity."

Zakaria El-Khnnany (Glassworks), **Kamel Ghandar** (Watercolours) and **Mohamed Oraby** (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 25 May.

Paul Rinaldi (Drawings, Paintings & Photographs) and **Julie Caosh** (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 29 May.

Ursula Brosch (Drawings and Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louk. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12pm-8pm. Until 29 May.

Hazem El-Mestikawy
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 2pm-9pm. Until 29 May.

Hedayet El-Mallawany (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 31 May.

Al-Ahram Artists Collective Exhibition
Al-Ahram Bldg, Main Hall, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100/400. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.

Works by Makram Henein, Nagwa El-Ashri, Nagui Kamel and Mohamed El-Nasser.

Group Show
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 4 June.

Munir El-Shaarani (Calligraphy)
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 18 May-5 June.

Around The World
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-2pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Seventeen French photographers exhibit 17 impressions from 17 countries.

John Feeney
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 5 June.
Architectural photographs.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

The Shimanto River
Japanese Cultural Centre, Japanese Embassy, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 15 May, 6pm.
Directed by Hideo Onchi.

Un Lugar En El Mundo
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture. 20 Adly St. Kodak passage. Downtown. Tel 395 2326. 21 May. 7.30pm.
Directed by Adolfo Aristarain.

German Films
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877.
15 May, 7pm: **Occasional Work of a Female Slave**, directed by Alexander Kluge (1973).
20 May, 7pm: **Sternstein Manor**, directed by Hans Geissendörfer (1975).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Samaka Wa Arba' Qoroush (A Fish and Four Sharks)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Emra'a Wa Khamas Regal (A Woman and Five Men)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Dante's Peak
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm.

The Juror
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Other Side of Silence

The Empire Strikes Back
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Phenomenon
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

Last Dance
MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Michael Collins
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Escape From L.A.
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Thur-Sat midnight show.

Jerry Maguire
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm, 3.30pm & 9.30pm.

Star Wars
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Craft
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Maximum Risk
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

MUSIC

Piano and Violin Recital
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824. 15 May, 7pm.
Nabil Ghoneim and Elena Damashvili perform.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 15 May, 9pm.
Flute soloist Inas Abdel-Daim and German soloist and conductor Torsten Janicke perform.

Nubian Folklore
Ethno Gallery, 38 Road 6, Maadi. Tel 350 6473. 15 & 16 May, 7pm.

The Merry Widow
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. Until 16 May, 9pm.
Cairo Opera Company, under Moustafa Nagui.

Violin and Piano Recital
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 17 May, 8pm.
David Hales (piano) and Isobar Achmedova (violin) perform a repertoire of classical Spanish music.

Violin Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 May, 9pm.
The class of professor Fakhry Bendar performs.

Cairo Choral Society
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 21 May, 8pm.
Under the direction of Larry Catlin, soloists and orchestra will perform the Solemn Vespers by Mozart and the Mass in G major by Schubert.

THEATRE

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Wallace Theatre, AUC, Greek Campus, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Until 17 May, 8pm.

The Other Face of Silence
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Until 18 May, 8.30pm.
Conceived and directed by Karim El-Tonsy, performed by Contemporary Dance Theatre Company.

Sisyphus and Death
French Cultural Centre, Mounira annex, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 20-22 May, 8pm.
Based on Robert Merle's play and presented by the Youth of Verbal Theatre Troupe.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Madinet Nasr. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 10pm.

Balouza Fil Balloon (Balouza at the Balloon)
Balloon Theatre, Corniche El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 347 1718. Daily 9pm.

Messa' El-Kheir Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt)
Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin St. Tel 770 603. Daily 9pm.

Wada'an Ya Bakawat (Farewell, Sirs)
George Abiad Hall, Ezbekiya Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9pm.

El-Mar'a Allati Tokallem Nafsaha Kathiran (The Woman Who Speaks to Herself too Much)
Zaki Tolaimat Hall, El-Tali'a Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 937 948. Daily 9pm.

El-Mahzala (The Disgrace)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 9pm.

LECTURES

The Rise and Fall of the Graeco-Roman Fayoum
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 344 8445. 15 May, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Dominic Rathbone, Department of Classics, Kings College, London.

Open Society, Pluralistic Polity and Liberal Education
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5436. 18 May, 4pm.
Lecture by Dr PJ Vatikiotis, professor of political science at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Liberal Education and Human Rights in the Middle East
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, as above. 19 May, 5pm.
Lecture and panel discussion by AUC professors Tori Haring-Smith from the department of Performing and Visual Arts, Mostafa El-Sayed, affiliate professor of Political Science and Daniel Vitkus, assistant professor of English Literature.

Come With Me From Lebanon
Oriental Hall, Main Campus, AUC, as above. 20 May, 6pm.
Ann Kerr, wife of late AUB president Malcom Kerr (assassinated in 1984) gives her own account of her book by the same title.

Les Elites Parlementaires en Haute-Egypte
CEDEJ, 14 Gam'eyet El-Nisr St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 20 May, 5pm.
Lecture in Arabic by Dr Ahmed Abdel-Raziq 'Allam, Public Organism of Information.

Germany's Post-Unification Foreign Policy
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref (Bustan) St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. 21 May, 7pm.
Lecture by Gerhard Thiedemann, cultural attache at the German Embassy. The lecture will be followed by the German film Politics for Peace (in German).

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries


Salah Zaki

GREEK mythology forms the inspiration for the series of engravings by **Pino Pandolfini**, on show at the **Centre of Arts**, Zamalek. Motifs drawn from ancient Greek myths are repeated in varying combinations across the picture surface.

The gallery at **Al-Hanager** plays host to recent works by **Salah Zaki**, abstract, luminous and amazingly confident, while the **Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation** shows black and white ink drawings of popular quarters by **Faris Ahmed Faris**.

Zaynab Amer shows 25 paintings under the collective title "A Beginning" at the **Opera House Gallery**. Realist landscapes and architectural studies, these are meticulous depictions of many places, including Siwa, Sharm El-Sheikh, Marsa Matrouh and small Delta villages.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Phobias at home

Old neurosis and new works: **Nigel Ryan** assesses some of the more interesting exhibits in the current round of exhibitions

There is something inescapably twee about the phrase home sweet home, a tweeness of which there is no doubt Romano Della Chiesa was aware when he selected it as the title for his current exhibition at the Mashrabiya Gallery. Quite wisely, the hominess is consistently, and in places, quite ruthlessly undercut by the exhibits.

Still, the title serves as a declaration of intent, of sorts. Romano Della Chiesa has, after all, been around the Cairo scene for some time. A Swiss national he has opted, for several years now, to make Cairo his home. Should one be inclined, then, to look for subtexts in the maudlin phrase, the most obvious would be Cairo sweet Cairo, though this might be too densely saccharine to brook any undercutting. Honey drenched carpets are sticky, and cannot be pulled from beneath even their creator's feet.

This exhibition, though, is straightforward, and it is about Cairo, the foreign city in which the artist has made his home. There will be elements familiar to anyone who has made the sometimes seemingly endless, enervating trawl around desultory furnished flats looking for somewhere to live. There is a vague obsession with consumer durables: refrigerators, televisions and washing machines all make an appearance, so that at times the exhibition feels like a pictorial inventory waiting to have items ticked off by weary landlord and wearier tenant. The fridge, a stencilled outline against a muted background is, almost inevitably, Ideal. One wonders if it really works. The washing machine, too, is hardly state of the art, though it has a rather specific purpose since stencilled next to the outline are the words "washing my soul". Cleanliness, evidently, is still next to godliness, with washing machines constituting an important route to salvation. There is even an installation, a lime green television — the real thing — in front of which sit scores of plaster cats.

Home, which is where the heart is, is replete with puns. A meticulous floral repeat wallpaper — chintzy roses in shades of pink, the background a little sullied — rises above a dado along which is stencilled the words *un mur est un mur est un mur est un mur*...and on and on one must suppose around all four walls.

The largest pieces included in the exhibition constitute a series, six works in total, sharing a common theme. Against backgrounds comprising either subdued arabesques or monochrome rococo urns holding symmetrical displays of flower silhouettes, the outlines of household objects are superimposed. These works may well serve as an exhortation to patience, since each bears the legend "waiting for the next". What is being awaited, however, is determined by the object depicted. The sink is waiting for the next drop, the cat is waiting for a mouse, the clothes peg on a washing line awaits the next sunbeam while an elaborately framed mirror waits for another beauty.

In Wyndham-Lewis's novel, *Snooty Baronet*, there is a character who talks endlessly about her full diary, and who pretends that her life is an endless party. Yet everyone knows this not the case because she answers the telephone just a little too quickly. Lewis's creation could well be sitting next to Romano Della Chiesa's telephone, waiting, of course, for the next call.

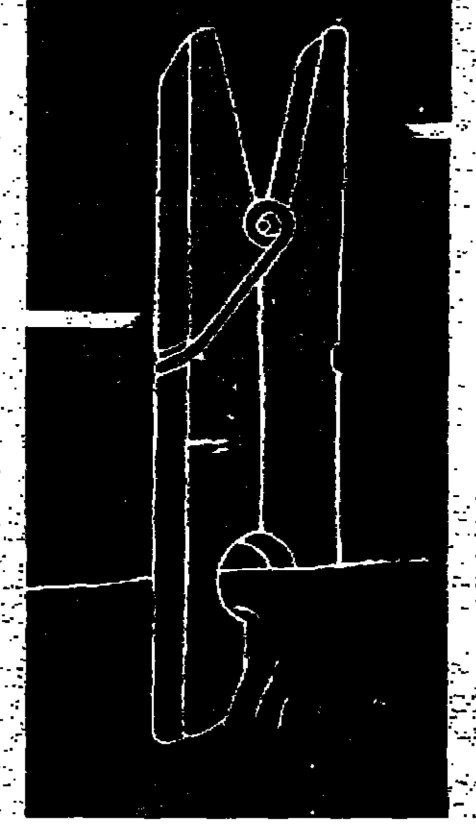
The visitor to this exhibition may also be waiting for something, though in the end nothing more is promised in the slightly self-conscious — though wholly appropriate — title than the exhibition actually delivers. Cool, ironic, pictorially accomplished, this is a glance through the window rather than a smashing of the glass though at times one longs to hear the sound of something breaking.

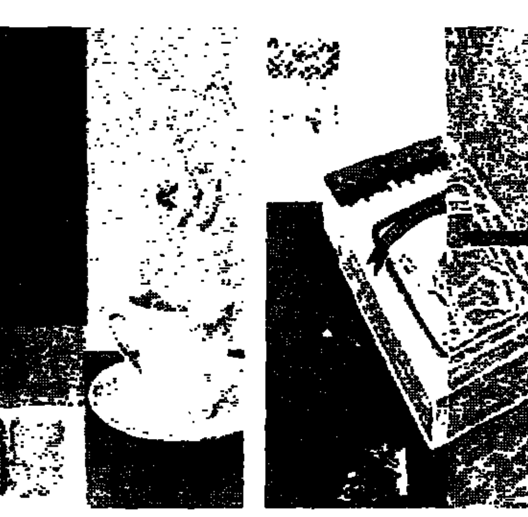
To the right of the entrance to the gallery there is a small painting — *Danse Macabre* — that might usefully serve as an exemplar of the artist's method. On the right, in a narrow column, is a vertical row of heads — Cleopatra, torn from branded cigarette packets. On the left the heads of cats, presumably Bastet, stencilled in a similarly narrow column. Attached to these heads without tails are skeletal arms, stretched into the body of the painting, where they mingle and seem to be weaving a complex, geometric pattern. It is nice to read the image as a commentary on that hoariest of clichés, the pseudo-critical insistence on discovering, in the work of every contemporary Egyptian artist a continuation of pharoanic, Coptic and Islamic elements. Not quite the crash of breaking glass but a satisfying tinkle.

If household objects play a central role in Romano Della Chiesa's works, they are equally at home in the exhibition staged by Ursula Brosch, which opened last week at Cairo Berlin Art Gallery.

This is the artist's first exhibition and it, too, declares a titular though more temporary allegiance to the city in which it is being held. The works are collected together under the title Cairo Transit.







***Cairo Transit* and *Home Sweet Home* — two exhibitions that, if their titles are anything to go by — attempt to describe the city in which the artists reside. Yet it is the *objet typif* of still-life, above left, that form the staple of Ursula Brosch's exhibition at Cairo Berlin Art Gallery while at the Mashrabiya Gallery Romano Della Chiesa adopts a more knowing approach to his adopted home**

Strangely, given the insistence on place embodied by the title, Ursula Brosch presents a series of still life-studies, table top arrangements of *objet typif* that make few concessions to location. There are exceptions — brass coffee pots of the kind that clog Khan El-Khallili, a painting of rows of Muski glass, backdrops that intimate mashrabiya screens — but by and large the painter concentrates on bowls of fruit, rush seated chairs and draped fabric backgrounds.

Though by today's standards this is hardly standard fare, the subject matter remains measured and traditional. Yet even so, Ursula Brosch manages to avoid the hackneyed, animating a genre that one might assume to have been done to death. That she manages to do this is testimony not just of enthusiasm, but a willingness to take risks.

It is impossible to escape the feeling that these are journeyman pieces. Ursula Brosch was a student of Margo Veillon and it shows, in the tilted perspectives and in the sudden flourishes that accompany her drawing. Yet she has a talent for animation, endowing chairs and coffee pots with an almost palpable personality. A talented colourist, she has yet to find a style which she can inhabit as her own though it may not be long before she does. And then, one can safely predict, the illustrative niceties of her current show will be replaced by something far more substantial.

Works by Mahmoud Menessi occupy the first floor gallery at the Cairo Atelier, the majority large scale drawings in black biro though some include an overlay of white wash. They are the result of a year long sabbatical, financed by a grant from the Ministry of Culture and are, as the artist writes in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, an expression of his attachment to Alexandria, the city of his birth. The idea for the drawings, Menessi writes, came from his observation of the submarine archeological excavations in Alexandria's harbour. Archaeological artefacts, he appears to insist, have become — somewhat ironically — post-modern icons, sacred objects in a secular world, having undergone an accidental deification by virtue of their age.

What Menessi attempts to do in his drawings is to reclaim these objects, to reinvest them with a more human dimension. And it is here that the confusions begin to arise. One is never quite sure whether what is being viewed is a human figure or a figure sculpted out of some inorganic material. True, the clues might at first seem obvious given that the majority of drawings are of hollow, broken figures. They appear, on first reading, to be cracked bronze casts or hollow plaster models. But they have lips, sometimes eyes, most often hair. And these cracked figures have a certain pedigree. In many cases they appear to be derived from the more lurid drawings of Salvador Dali — certainly they seem to have their roots in the same kind of adolescent misogyny.

There is nothing comforting about these images, even if the neuroses of which they appear to speak were well-trodden ground half a century before. Breasts are constricted by metal clamps. Wooden planks are nailed on to the surface of the broken flesh/statuary, covering every orifice. Mouths are gagged — indeed, the full complement of sado-masochistic devices is evinced in the details. In a particularly lurid image the detached head of a woman is suspended from a hook which pierces the neck, hair dangling beneath the picture frame.

The comic strip super heroine dimensions of the figures — the emphasis is always on the external, on the hardness of flesh, the threatening rather than vulnerable aspects of the body — serves merely to emphasise the fetishistic objectification these figures have undergone. Yet even though the threat has been broken, the body shattered, the artist appears intent on inflicting other mutilations. The result, often, is a degeneration into the kind of shock tactics that would look more at home in adult comics, a genre that may well have had its hey day, or on the cover of heavy metal LPs, objects that are longer made.

It all looks remarkably tired. The odd thing is that in context, it still manages to shock. And, tellingly, the only pieces that appeared intent on non-violence, on actually humanising their subjects, involve a de-sexed couple embracing. In Mahmoud Menessi's world, one would probably be much more comfortable, and likely to survive longer, made of marble. You know where he is at — probably because you have been there before — but is it really worth revisiting? One man's neurosis is, alas, all too often just another person's bore.

Romano Della Chiesa exhibits at the Mashrabiya Gallery, Ursula Brosch at Cairo Berlin, Mahmoud Menessi at Cairo Atelier. For full details, see Listings

Plain Talk

Can radio serve as a useful medium when it comes to describing visual works of art? The question recently received a deal of attention following the broadcast of a series of five programmes, The Outline around the Shadow, on BBC Radio Three.

During the course of the series the presenter, Deanna Patherbridge, attempted to describe a wide range of drawings, by both old masters and contemporary artists. A number of critics were enthusiastic about the programme, and insisted that the presenter had done an excellent job in conveying the impression that such works of art make on the viewer.

Throughout the series the programme followed the same format, with its presenter beginning each programme by announcing the name of the gallery she was visiting. There would then follow a detailed description of the work in front of which she was standing. Of the presenter's commentary, one newspaper critic wrote: "You hear her looking as she speaks, each phrase formed in front of the drawing itself, each pause becoming another glance. It gives a sense of immediate contact."

What Deanna Patherbridge was doing, to my mind, is actually very similar to what is regularly done in art reviews. She was attempting to convey, through the medium of words, something of the nature of an artwork completed in a medium other than language. And certainly this seems to me a good thing, not least because, if it is done well, it is likely to encourage the sometimes sedentary listeners to actually visit the galleries themselves.

I am, in any case, already a great supporter of the radio and there is absolutely no need for anyone to convince me of its merits. I am one of the converted, and strongly believe that radio plays an important role in encouraging the play of imagination. I still remember the marvellous programming of the BBC in the 1940s, when television was little more than a novelty. Police serials, detective stories — whatever the genre, I almost invariably found the radio products more convincing than their cinema counterparts. Few arenas can be as testing on the director and performer's skills as radio drama, which must, through the medium of sound paint a coherent and convincing picture of the world.

Certainly, it would seem, the choice of drawing as the subject of The Outline around the Shadow was a clever move, since it is far more easy to describe than painting. Drawings are, after all, a kind of record of work in progress. One can describe the drawing in terms of its own materialisation, in terms of the application by the artist of the individual lines that go to make up the whole. There is something far more immediate and spontaneous about drawing than painting, and it is easier to imagine the sensations that went into the making of the artwork than in the case of painting which, more often than not, is a far more laboured process. And in giving such a description, radio has, ironically, an advantage over television, which can only present a static image, frozen on the screen.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

Essaying a reassessment

Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History, ed Amira El-Azhari Sonbol, Syracuse University Press, 1996

Women the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History is a collection of 18 essays gathered and edited by historian Amira El-Azhari Sonbol. The collection includes the work of Middle Eastern, European and American historians, men and women, from different backgrounds. "The work," writes Elizabeth Warnock Fernea in the foreword, "challenges the received wisdom about the status of Middle Eastern women," while Sonbol comments in her introduction that "conceptualising the modern period as diametrically opposite to a traditional one, has caused numerous misunderstandings in, or of the history of, Muslim women."

Such statements imply an intention to adopt new methodological tools in an effort to discover non-Orientalist paradigms in a field that has seen more than its share of mystification. Sonbol contends, for instance, that Muslim women's "access to divorce had changed from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century," although the basis of the law, the *shari'a*, has remained the same.

While modernisation is seen as having undoubtedly improved the situation of women to one of "greater openness and less seclusion," allowing women a greater public role, it should be emphasised that "the historical transformation of the last two centuries actually brought about a general deterioration in social maneuverability, especially for women." This deterioration, argues Sonbol, "was closely tied to the evolution of new state structures, that fit the needs of new hegemonic elite combines, usually formed from alliances between foreign business interests and Westernising national leaders."

In "Marriage among Merchant Families in Seventeenth-Century Cairo", Nelly Hanna confirms that "[a] number of historians have made connections between the growth of the modern state and the development of patriarchy in the family, both in Europe and in the Middle East. The need for the state to extend its controls through the family seems to have been a recurrent phenomenon, which historians have noted in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England as well as in nineteenth-century Egypt. This control through the family was done in a number of ways. One of them was by changing and codifying family law; another by concentrating property rights on male heads of families."

Most researchers in Muslim women's studies, writes Sonbol, have come to realise that *shari'a* court records are often in contradiction with the generally accepted idea that modern legal reforms, comprising the "Europeanisation" of the law, its secularisation and rationalisation, changed women's status favourably. She argues further that, while Middle Eastern women's studies should not take Western feminism as a point of reference, neither should the study of the condition of women before the so-called modern times rely solely on "formal" sources. "Different types of research, particularly archival and literary, show that social patterns were in great contrast to the 'official' picture presented by these 'formal' sources."

In this particular volume, the contributors to the series of articles in which the often misunderstood condition of Middle Eastern women is discussed, have attempted to examine archival material with "a fresh eye" and have asked new questions.

Thus, in "Women and Citizenship in the Qur'an", Barbara Stowasser shows that, "notwithstanding the existence of a body of Islamic laws acceptable to the Muslim community at large, there are clear differences between the written word and actual practices during Islamic history." Similar conclusions are reached by Julia Clancey Smith in "Women and Sexuality in France's North African Empire" and by Peter Gran in "Organisation of Culture and Construction of the Family in the Modern Middle East."

In "Women and Modernisation: A Reevaluation", Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot shows that, during the Mameluke period in Egypt, working women had an active part in the economic life of their community, and that their level of education was not sensibly inferior to the men's. Under Mohamed Ali, however, following "his confiscation of most money-making elements and his redistribution of wealth among his dependants, women lost control over the land they held." The condition of women deteriorated as a result, and they were left with only two fields in which to exercise their commercial activities, namely services and the preparation of food.

Using 18th-century *awqaf* (religious endowment) records, Mary Ann Fay illustrates "women's participation in their families' decision-making," while Nelly Hanna sets out to challenge the widely accepted cliché of "oriental despotism" in relation to the Ottoman middle-class household by presenting the 17th-century family of a Cairene merchant leader, Shahbandar Al-Tujjar Ismail Abu Taqqiyya, in her article.

Each article in the volume deals with different Middle Eastern countries and subjects "but are all integrated in the sense that they are designed to provide a better understanding of the history of women and the family in Islamic society." There are several goals to the volume, writes Sonbol. One of them is "to focus on the history of women, family law, and divorce, with the purpose of assessing gender relations and the status of women." Another is "to raise questions of importance to the history of women and the family that have received little if any attention by scholars." A new methodology and the necessity to begin historical studies with archival sources followed by literary sources and historical analysis are also stressed throughout the volume.

Of course, the problems inherent in any collection of articles also plague this volume which, gathering as it does a relatively disparate group of studies, cannot aspire to a total unity of findings, or even to a common agenda. Yet such drawbacks are largely mitigated, in this case, by the fact that all the authors are involved in a similar effort to debunk widely accepted myths, based on little more than abstraction and generalisation.

If the backgrounds of the writers are very different, this makes for welcome diversity rather than incoherence. The main advantage to such a work is the fact that, by bringing together a variety of specialisations, it presents solid evidence to back the goals stated in the introduction. And only such a collection of essays, it must be remembered, could span such a wide geographical and historical landscape, providing the historian with food for thought, and the general reader with genuine insight.

Reviewed by ***Fayza Hassan***

A kind of choice

With the recent uproar over the possibility of personalised marriage contracts, and the subsequent rejection of this idea, it is revealing to examine marriage contracts dating from before the modernisation of the personal status law. In an article published in *Al-Dustur* on 29 May 1996, Emad Abu Ghazi, professor of archival studies at Cairo University, provides examples of some of the conditions imposed by women on their spouses-to-be.

According to case 159, from the archives at Dar El-Kutub, in 259 AH (the ninth century AD) a marriage contract stipulated that the *mahr* (dowry) must be paid in two equal instalments of two gold dinars each, the first before the marriage, the second five years later, for the wife to dispose of as she pleased. The wife who, interestingly, did not hold the *'esma* (right to divorce herself from her husband) stipulated in the marriage contract that, should her husband remarry once or more, the *'esma* of each of the new wives would remain in the first wife's possession, giving her the right to institute proceedings to divorce her husband from any of his new wives at any time.

Twenty years after this contract had been signed in court the first wife, who seemed to have lost none of her influence in the household, demanded that the contract be amended to include her rights over her husband's concubines, whom she could set free or sell at any time. The wife also demanded that a new clause be added stipulating that her husband had no right to prevent her from visiting her family, or vice versa, at any time.

During the Ottoman period, one marriage contract (*Qism Askariyya* series, register no 5, case no 8, Cairo Property Registration Bureau) included the husband's vow never to marry a second wife or take a concubine. Should he do so, he would be obliged to pay the *mu'akhar* (deferred dowry) immediately and divorce his first wife definitively.

The archives of the Damietta *Shar'ia* Tribunal (register no 36, case no 5) contain another case revealing much about the freedom some women had to dictate conditions before agreeing to marry. One wife stipulated in her marriage contract that, if her husband went on a journey that lasted more than six days, she could be divorced definitively from him.

These cases seem to confirm that the abstract study of law and jurisprudence gives an often erroneous idea of the subjugated condition of women in the "pre-modern" period. Of course, women's ability to impose conditions upon their husbands in their marriage contracts depended on a variety of factors, not least among them the women's social class, family influence, and personal experience. But it is this very variety, some would argue, that made for a more flexible situation in the years before state-building endeavours unified women's condition and, ultimately, restricted their ability to obtain more favourable conditions in conjugal life.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Dinshway, a small village in the Nile Delta, has become a byword for Egyptian nationalism and the struggle against foreign occupation since it witnessed a clash between peasants and British military officers nearly a century ago. The clash, in which one British officer and one peasant were killed, was followed by a summary trial of more than 50 peasants, of whom four were publicly executed, 12 imprisoned and five flogged — all in the space of 16 days, from 13 June to 29 June 1906



Illustration: Makram Henein

"A tragic incident took place between villagers and soldiers of the occupation army who were passing through Menufiya. Details follow by post." Thus read the text of *the telegram dispatched* by *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Shebin El-Kom at precisely 6.30pm Wednesday, 13 June 1906. Thirty-five minutes later, he rushed off a second telegram which read: "Five officers from the occupation army were *hunting in Dinshway in the district of* Shebin El-Kom. A woman and her daughter were wounded by bullets fired by the hunters and the commander of the village sentinels was also wounded. The villagers flew into a rage and attacked the hunters. One of the British officers died and many others were wounded in the ensuing affray. The district director, the chief prosecutor and the inspector from the Ministry of Interior are investigating the incident. When all the findings come to light, your correspondent will inform you."

The above dispatches were the first items to appear in *Al-Ahram* regarding this notorious event in Egyptian history. The Dinshway incident marked a watershed in the history of the British occupation. It has been the subject of considerable scholastic research. All scholars who have treated the history of the Egyptian *nationalist* movement or the life of the famous nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel have devoted considerable attention to the catalytic role played by the Dinshway incident.

Examining *Al-Ahram* over the six weeks that followed the incident, one feels as though one is reading about it for the first time. Unlike the scholastic works which focus primarily on the political implications of the incident, the newspaper account brings us closer to the human side of the issue. The conflicting emotions — fear, thirst for revenge, mourning — become much more palpable in the day-by-*day coverage of the press. The newspaper*, one feels, was an active participant, frequently expressing its views and its own feelings as events unfolded that brought the name of Dinshway to prominence in 20th century Egyptian history.

At 9am the following morning *Al-Ahram*'s Shebin El-Kom writes: "The honourable district chief has taken charge of investigations which are being observed by the adviser to the Ministry of Interior and the chief prosecutor. Many inhabitants of Dinshway have been taken into custody." Later, at 12.05pm he informs us: "What is known of this incident up to the present is that five men from the occupation army have been wounded and one has died and five villagers have been wounded and one died. Seventeen people have been arrested on charges related to the disturbances." Then, 20 minutes later: "Several British officers and soldiers have just arrived at the train station. They are carrying with them 24 tents and are on their way to Dinshway in order to maintain the peace."

Evidently, while *Al-Ahram* appeared intent on portraying this incident as a brawl between the village peasants and a few pigeon hunting occupation officers, the British authorities had decided to stage a show of force.

Perhaps this move was inspired by events in the capital. As *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Shebin El-Kom was at the scene, the newspaper's correspondent in Cairo covered the military ceremonies at the funeral of Captain Seymour Clark Paul, the officer killed in Dinshway. He writes, "The procession proceeded from the citadel to the accompaniment of military funerary music. The coffin, mounted on a gun carriage, was preceded by an advance guard of infantry and mounted soldiers. In its wake followed the commander and deputy commander of the British occupation army, the British High Commissioner Lord Cromer, officials from the British Agency and the British Consulate, and all the officers." The newspaper was careful to note certain facts related to his death. "The coroners have ascertained that *Captain Paul died as the result of a heart* attack and not directly from his wounds. The wound that may have brought on the heart attack was inflicted on the head of the deceased who evidently walked a distance of three miles after having sustained this wound." Undoubtedly, the newspaper was eager to clear the villagers of the possible allegation of murder.

Al-Ahram's 18 June edition carried the "Government communiqué on the Dinshway incident." The communiqué was disturbing as, firstly, it accused the *fellahin* of provoking the British soldiers and, secondly, it refused to entertain the notion that a bullet fired from the rifle of one of the soldiers could have ignited the fire that broke out in one of the village barns. Rather, it said, "it is more logical that it was the villagers who deliberately set fire to the barn in order to signal the beginning of a general uprising against the soldiers." The communiqué also refuted the fact that Captain Paul had died of a heart attack, insisting that he received "two violent blows on the head."

Al-Ahram's response took up the bulk of the front page of the same edition. Reading more like an affidavit of defence for the peasants of Dinshway, it alluded to the zeal with which Egyptian peasants rise to the defence of their land. The article appealed for leniency "so that the task of driving home a lesson does not become revenge, for here we have a village that claims its livelihood was threatened and that its lands were trespassed upon, arguments that must in some way vindicate them and detract from the gravity of their crime."

On 19 June, the newspaper's correspondent in Shebin El-Kom dispatched two telegrams. The first announced that a prominent lawyer, Ismail Bek Assem, had volunteered to defend the accused and that he had already charged another lawyer on his staff, Ahmed Effendi Mahmoud, with following through on the investigations. The second telegram announced that 91 villagers from Dinshway had been arrested and taken to Tanta Hospital so that they could be inspected by one of the injured *officers who was recuperating there*. The telegram also announced, "The officials from the court will be arriving on Sunday evening."

It was decided that the members of the special tribunal would leave Cairo the following Saturday in order to arrive in Menufiya on Sunday 24 June. *Al-Ahram* was careful to stress again that "what occurred in the village could have happened anywhere in Egypt. The *fellahin* had not deliberately singled out the English for their hostility. Nor should the desire to avenge the British officer be the sole aim of disciplinary measures. Indeed, the entire commotion that has been stirred up over this issue is simply due to the fact that the razor happened to nick the chin of the occupiers."

Two days before the special tribunal was scheduled to convene, *Al-Ahram* launched what was tantamount to an appeal to the Egyptian members of the court to be guided by their consciences and "to take into sympathetic consideration their knowledge of the Egyptian peasants' morals and customs." It also urged the British members of the tribunal "to rise to the principles of liberty and justice that have been instilled in them and to which they have been raised in their own country and to rule in the name of this liberty and justice so that they may demonstrate to the world that injury to a member of their own nation will not instigate them to abuse these lofty principles."

The day before the trial was opened *Al-Ahram* reported that 59 villagers faced charges but that only 51 would stand in the dock because eight had fled. Twenty-eight witnesses were scheduled to testify. Heading the list were the four injured officers. The government made some issue of the fact that several of the accused had police records. However, at closer inspection these records turned out to be for the most trivial offenses: two days imprisonment for hitting another person eight years previously, a fine of 100 piastres for hitting another person two years previously. Yet the prosecution's intentions were clear: to prosecute these individuals as though they *were repeated offenders*.

In another display of strength that also carried symbolic weight, another unit of British troops was sent into the village. The court went into session in Shebin El-Kom, the capital of the directorate of Menufiya.

Already at the crack of dawn on 24 June, an enormous crowd had assembled in the square before the government headquarters of this rural capital. The court procedures which occupied the bulk of the pages of *Al-Ahram* and other Egyptian newspapers over the next 72 hours contribute little new to what is contained in the many scholastic works that have treated the Dinshway incident. The court sentenced four men from the ill-fated village to death, two to life imprisonment with hard labour, one to 15 years imprisonment, six to seven years, three to one year and five to 50 floggings each. The rest of the accused were acquitted. However, what the scholastic works did omit was the portrayal of the tragic execution of these sentences 48 hours after they were passed. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent provides first hand testimony of this distressful event.

At 4.00am on Friday 29 June crowds had gathered before the prison building in Shebin El-Kom. All were awaiting for the appearance of the prisoners who would be taken to Dinshway where the sentences of the court would be carried out. At precisely 4.35am, the prisoners were brought out. "They were put into two transport vehicles, their hands shackled by chains. The vehicles moved in a procession surrounded by guards until they arrived at the execution grounds to await the hour of execution. The men who had been sentenced to death were in a cart by themselves and behind them was the cart carrying the *gallows scaffold*."

The execution grounds were filled with the sounds of women wailing, a sight which deeply disturbed *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent who was "deeply moved by the spectacle of those crying for their beloved kinsmen, with their faces ashen, their necks bound, their tears flowing and the voices crying out in despair."

It took some time to set up the gallows. Al-Ahram wrote: "Ashmawi, the executioner, was personally supervising the workmen and occasionally helping the carpenters. Several guards also assisted in his dismal work. One could see the flogging equipment suspended on the edges of the gallows."

At 1.00pm a cloud of dust rose on the eastern horizon, signaling the arrival of the occupation army representatives. Everyone made ready to receive the procession, with their hearts trembling and tears brimming over in their eyes in anticipation of the spectacle they would see within moments. Fifteen minutes later the accused arrived on the execution grounds. The crying and wailing that went up is indescribable.

British mounted soldiers ringed the square and behind them was a ring of Egyptian cavalry soldiers. "All had their swords unsheathed and their rifles loaded, in a grisly display of strength."

At 1:30pm the accused were placed inside the appropriate tents and inspected by the coroner, the chief physician of Shebin El-Kom and the chief medical inspector of Menufiya. Five minutes later, procedures for the largest political massacre committed by the occupation authorities were set in motion.

Hassan Mahfouz was the first prisoner to be brought out of the tent. "A man of between 50 and 60 years of age," he was dressed in black and his eyes were covered by a white blindfold. The director of executions recited passages from the Qur'an and then delivered the prisoner to Ashmawi, the executioner. The prisoner was trembling violently throughout and when he was led up to the gallows he called out, "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is the Prophet of God!" The condemned man repeated this continuously until the sentence was carried out.

Hassan Ismail El-Sisi was the next to be brought out in order to receive the punishment of 50 floggings. Men from the fire brigade took El-Sisi, removed his shirt and tied him up to a wooden frame. "As the executioner flogged him with the whip, the prisoner cried out in pain from the severity of the flogging. After 30 lashes the victim fell silent. After the full 50 lashes had been administered, the victim was unbound and carried off to the tent designated for those who had received the punishment of flogging."

Ibrahim Hassanein El-Sisi followed "As the flogging began, he cried out "Have mercy on me!" until the 25th lashing at which point he fell silent, his body quivering with every lashing until the 50th *lashing* was executed. When they unbound him, he fell to the ground unconscious."

As these proceedings were under way, the gallows were being prepared for the second prisoner to be executed. This was Yusef Hassan Salim, "a young, thin man who had been accused of hitting Captain Paul who had been killed." All he was reported as saying before his execution, after *reciting the customary declaration of faith*, was "May God take revenge upon the oppressors!"

Then two more prisoners were flogged before the third victim was sent to the gallows. El-Sayed Isa Salem was a young man of about 35. "I am a *Muslim* and I swear by the one God that I am innocent of any religion that violates Islam."

The fourth man to be sent to the gallows — after two more prisoners were flogged — was Mohamed Darwish Zahran.

By 3pm the executioners were collecting their equipment and preparing to leave the bereaved village. Hardly had they left behind the grief-stricken villagers than the political repercussions began to reverberate between Cairo, London and Paris, repercussions that are amply recorded in the history books that have covered the tragic story of Dinshway.



The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Money & Business

Egyptian commodities conference



Dr Ensslin

Dr Joachim Ensslin, managing director of Munich Trade Fair Corporation, is scheduled to visit Egypt to attend a conference on the presence of Egyptian products in the international markets, which will take place at the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel.

Dr Ensslin will deliver a lecture, on the activities of the Munich Fair, to be held in the fair ground where 2,400 exhibitors meet. Approximately two million people visit the Munich Fair annually.

IMAC is a subsidiary of the Munich Corporation and is specialised in providing services related to the organisation of fairs.

Citibank base rate set

With the development of the Egyptian Financial Markets in both size and sophistication, the need for a market determined reference rate for pricing loans has arisen. Citibank has therefore decided to periodically quote an Egyptian pound base rate from which it will price its overdrafts to its clients. Clients will be quoted the base rate plus a spread. Given current market conditions, the base rate is being set at 9.75 per cent as of today.

National Bank of Egypt financing services for small-scale projects

In line with its constant endeavours to support economic reform policies and create new job opportunities, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) adopts a comprehensive programme for financing small-scale industries and projects; given their catalytic role in the economic development process.

NBE has embarked upon expanding such services since mid-1960, a fact which equipped the Bank with a *great experience in financing* the entrepreneurs of small-scale projects at conceeionary terms. The Bank is currently extending such services either from its self-resources or in cooperation with the Social Fund for Development (SFD).

In October 1990, the NBE allocated a sum of LE150 million for such a purpose. This sum has been gradually raised to LE 358 million by the end of February 1997. *Beneficiaries* of this programme, including craftsmen, young graduates and cooperatives, total some 25,830.

Total loans approved by the Bank in the framework of the SFD amounted to LE301 million as at the end of last February. These loans were extended to 6,854 operating and 8,588 new projects. Moreover, the Bank has participated in the new graduates mobile marketing and services outlets project in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and the SFD. The project covers 291 beneficiaries.

On the other hand, the Bank, in coordination with the Ministry of Industry and Industries Federation, has innovated a special system for financing small and medium-scale projects with investment costs ranging between LE500,000 and LE1 *million. However, labour*-intensive and hi-tech projects together with the projects established in Upper Egypt are given first priority.

In addition, the Bank has participated with other parties in the European Common Market's Programme for Developing the Food Sector geared towards enhancing agricultural cooperatives and individual entities.

The National Bank of Egypt has also tailored a training programme under specialized experts to train businessmen on the latest ways of finance, management and marketing in order to improve and boost their experience and performance. The Bank has also explored and gathered a new group of businessmen, to give them access to investment opportunities and enhance the participation of the private business sector in giant projects.

In fact, the Bank's endeavours in this respect represents but one aspect of its overall strategy oriented towards accelerating Egypt's economic reform programme as well as enhancing its own performance.

Misr Exterior: a model Bank of prosperous investments in Egypt



Mohamed Nabil Ibrahim, executive board chairman of Misr Exterior Bank, has stated that the 15th meeting of the General Assembly — to approve the balance sheet of 1996 — indicates the continuous success of Misr Exterior Bank which is considered a prime example of booming foreign investments in Egypt.

Misr Exterior Bank is an Egyptian-Spanish joint venture launched by virtue of the decision taken by both President Sadat and Juan Carlos, king of Spain, who assigned Banque Misr and Banque Exterior de Espana.

Hence, in 1981, Misr Exterior Bank was launched as a fruit of Egyptian-Spanish cooperation. The Bank initiated its activity with a paid up capital of LE7 million of which both Banque Misr and Banque Exterior de Espana *each own an equal share* of 40 per cent. The remaining 20 per cent is owned by Arab and foreign businessmen.

It is worth noting that Misr Exterior Bank is run collectively by a group of distinguished *Spanish economic figures who* positively contribute to the successful administration of the Bank. Figures clearly highlight such success, with the Bank's capital increasing from LE135 million in 1982 to LE3.7 billion in December 1996.

The loans and investments portfolio surged from LE26 million in 1982 to an amazing LE2.5 billion in December 1996. Furthermore, deposits took a remarkable upward trend, rising from LE28 million in 1982 to LE3.1 billion in December 1996. Shareholders' equities rose from the figure of LE7.6 million in 1982 to LE222 million in December 1996. Over the same period, revenues have increased from LE9 million to LE315 million and net profits have risen from LE2.5 million in 1982 to LE53 million in 1996.

Many branches of Misr Exterior Bank can be found in the most outstanding locations in Cairo and Alexandria. Moreover, Misr Exterior Bank was the first of the joint venture banks to manage privatisation and introduce new banking services via its web site on the Internet, which helped grab a large number of home banking clients. This is apart from the Bank's vast network of cash dispensers located all over Egypt.

In a clear demonstration of the confidence placed by international investment foundations in Misr Exterior Bank, the Inter*national Financing Agency registered the* Bank as one of the most promising banks in the developing markets. The Banker's Almanac mentioned Misr Exterior Bank among 3,000 banks worldwide which own the *largest assets. Therefore, Misr Exterior* Bank proves to be a true example of successful joint ventures worldwide.

Not since the agrarian reform measures in the 1950s and 1960s has the mood in rural Egypt been so split between hopeful anticipation, on the one hand, and a deep sense of dread of the future, on the other. Government and opposition, intellectuals and activists, economists and administrators watch in awe as the tidal wave of privatisation hits the banks of the Nile.

For years, farmers have clamoured for the government to lift its price controls over the agricultural sector. Agricultural landowners, big and small, as well as tenant farmers and even agricultural labourers seemed to have common cause so long as liberalisation concerned lifting the state pricing of crops. This ceased to be the case, however, when it came to giving the market free rein in determining labour and tenancy relations in the countryside.

Come October, a law liberalising the leasing of agricultural land will come into full effect. When the first stage of the law was implemented five years ago, the rent of agricultural land tripled overnight, but remained, most will admit, low. In October, the ceiling on land rents will be removed, and experts expect massive rent hikes. More scary are predictions of wide-scale evictions from the land that could leave tens of thousands of tenants landless, bitter, and with nothing to lose.

Several opposition parties warn of a tragic scenario where evictions lead to widespread protests in the countryside. They claim that up to six million villagers could be turned out of their land. These parties (see "Beware peasants' wrath"), call for a formula of help to be provided to tenants and counsel a delay in the law's implementation.

The government believes that the law's detractors are exaggerating (see "Liberalisation must go on"). If successfully implemented, the law will be a landmark in the government's economic reforms programme. But recent clashes in the countryside (see "Fayoum sign?") could not have failed to signal the seriousness of the risks involved.

Land and the market



photo: Mohamed Wassim

photo: Sami Bushra

Next October, the '90s 'free market' meets the '50s and '60s 'land to the tiller'. The government insists there are no grounds for fear

Recent incidents of violent confrontation between tenant farmers and landlords have triggered a furious debate. With the full liberalisation of land tenancy ties due in October, critics have seized upon the incidents as portents of dire things to come. But the government, describing opposition warnings as "exaggerations", remains unswerving in its commitment to full liberalisation

Liberalisation must go on

Incidents of bloody confrontation between tenant farmers and landlords has provoked mixed responses in parliamentary circles, where representatives of farmers and workers occupy half the seats.

Abu Bakr El-Basel, a leading parliamentary deputy of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) for El-Fayoum Governorate, argued that the recent bloody clash in Abu Nassar should not be seen as the beginning of a wave of violence set to sweep the countryside in the coming months.

"Yes, it is true that the actual application of the landlord-tenant law might affect some small-scale farmers negatively," said El-Basel. "However, it is also true that some of these negative ramifications were anticipated while the law was being debated around five years ago by the People's Assembly Agriculture and Irrigation Committee," he added.

El-Basel, who was the chairman of the parliamentary Agriculture Committee in 1992, said that most of the political parties which were invited to submit their views on the law in April 1992, agreed that the law should be in line with Islamic *Shari'a* (law) in terms of liberalising the landlord-tenant relationship and basing new rental contracts on the free will of the two negotiating parties.

Besides, El-Basel continued, the committee also held six sessions in which representatives of political parties, agricultural cooperatives and businessmen's organisations were invited to submit their viewpoints.

"In all of these sessions, most of these representatives agreed that liberalising the landlord-tenant relationship is a necessary step towards liberalising the economy as a whole and called for the repeal of socialist laws which were promulgated in the '50s and '60s," said El-Basel. They also emphasised that the law is necessary to redress the injustice done to landowners whose rental incomes had diminished over the years, he said.

According to El-Basel, the left-wing Tagammu Party, which is now leading the campaign against the law, also originally agreed to the law — under certain conditions. For example, that tenant farmers should have the right to buy the land at a reduced price should the landowner decide to sell it, he said. Tagammu, said El-Basel, also called for the establishment of a LE4 billion Agricultural *Takaful* (mutual support) Fund (ATF) to compensate farmers who might be evicted from their land.

"As far as I know, the Ministry of Agriculture has taken concrete steps towards establishing such a fund. The minister of agriculture, Youssef Wali, has announced, following the bloody clashes in Daqahliya and El-Fayoum, that the ministry is ready to study the cases of any tenant farmers who might be negatively affected by the application of the law next October in terms of providing them with land in newly reclaimed areas," said El-Basel.

For all of these reasons, El-Basel concluded, the law should be implemented on schedule "not only because the recent violent clashes are limited" but also as an indication of the government's serious commitment to liberalising the economy.

Minister Wali, addressing the People's Assembly on agricultural production recently, emphasised that the agricultural rented land accounts for just 16 per cent of the total cultivated area. Wali argued that the estimates of some parliamentary deputies and political parties of tenant farmers who could be evicted from their land are "too exaggerated."

According to Ahmed Abu Zeid, leader of the NDP parliamentary majority, the law takes the interests of both parties into account. "Most of the fears about the application of the law are quite exaggerated. The recent violent events in Fayoum and Daqahliya should not be exaggerated. They were caused, to a large extent, by deeply rooted animosity, not just the approaching application of the law," said Abu Zeid.

Therefore, he added, extending the transitional period will not only complicate the problem, but will also dash hopes of moving to a completely free market by the next century. "The successful implementation of the law next October will greatly encourage the government to proceed with submitting a new law liberalising the landlord-tenant relationship in old housing units. The Supreme Constitutional Court has recently ruled that non-residential contracts should be left to the free negotiation of the two parties to allow a balanced relationship between landlords and tenants. I think the application of the agricultural landlord-tenant law next October copes with this principle completely," said Abu Zeid.

'When big shots talk about the poorest of the poor, they really mean us. There are about 1,000 villagers living here and we have nothing. Just look around you'
Mohamed Rashid
(a villager from Fayoum whose son was accidentally shot by landlords celebrating the eviction of their tenants; pictured above)

'Most of the fears about the application of the law are quite exaggerated. The recent violent events in Fayoum and Daqahliya ... were caused, to a large extent by deeply rooted animosity, not just the approaching application of the law'
Ahmed Abu Zeid
(leader of the parliamentary bloc of the ruling NDP)



'You should go on exerting pressure until you get your rights'
Khaled Mohieddin,
(leader of the Tagammu Party, addressing tenants)

'We accepted the soaring increase in rents, which was too much for the poor farmers who live from hand to mouth. Yet we will not leave our land, come what may'
Fattouh Mohamed,
(a farmer leasing four feddans in Kafr El-Sheikh)

Beware peasants' wrath

FIRST IN THE FORAY: In the offices of the left-wing Tagammu Party, the sense of *déjà vu* was tangible. "We have been warning against such a law ever since the idea regarding the need to change the existing relations between tenants and owners was floated in the '70s," noted Hussein Abdel-Razek, a member of Tagammu Political Bureau.

Tagammu leader Khaled Mohieddin voiced strong opposition to the law, calling for a five-year delay in its implementation "during which period tenants and landlords would settle the matter peacefully". Mohieddin urged tenants to make a stand. "Go on exercising pressure until you get your rights," he said.

Gouda Abdel-Khalek, chairman of the Tagammu's Economy Committee, hopes that a five-year postponement would allow time for a proper assessment of the situation. "We do not have the necessary statistics to study the problem in detail. We only have the figures of the 1980 agricultural survey and we have been unable to obtain the 1991 figures."

The Tagammu has motioned a bill calling for a five-year delay at the People's Assembly, but the bill has not been debated yet, a fact that party members believe was not accidental. "When the government does not want something discussed it never moves up from the Suggestions and Complaints Committee," Abdel-Razek grumbled.

FEUDAL OVERTONES: The Islamist-oriented Labour Party also calls for a delay. "We think that the implementation of the law should be held up for three years, during which time alternative plots of land should be found for evicted tenants," said Mohsen Hashim, a People's Assembly member from the Labour Party.

Abdel-Hamid Barakat, assistant secretary-general of the Labour Party, said the law is reminiscent of the feudal system which prevailed prior to agricultural reform. "If the government wants to be fair to the landlords, it should act in the same way toward tenants."

SEEKING THE GRASSROOTS: The Democratic Nasserist Party (DNP) supports a delay in the law's implementation. Beshir Ghoneim, a farmer and a party member, takes a grim view of the situation. If the government insists on implementing the law, he said, "peasants would declare a state of civil disobedience."

A breakaway group from the DNP headed by Hamdin El-Sabahi went as far as setting up a Peasants' Popular Resistance Committee, a body aiming to coordinate action in rural areas against the legislation. "The law will not be applied so long as there are courageous peasants who are ready to die for their just cause", El-Sabahi said.

FULL-HEARTED SUPPORT: The one opposition party that lent its unequivocal support to the law was the Wafd Party. Liberal, right-of-centre, and traditionally affiliated with the landed classes, the Wafd sees the law as righting decades of wrong. "The time has come to compensate landlords who were deprived for more than 40 years of their property," said Wafd parliamentary deputy Yassin Serageddin, a brother of Wafd leader Fouad Serageddin.

Yassin Serageddin said the law is fair and must be implemented without delay. "Any delay in its implementation will make things worse. The law has already been postponed for five years and nothing was accomplished during this period."

According to Serageddin, the law does not subject tenants to any injustice. "Most leases will not be cancelled, as the majority of landlords do not have the time nor the experience to cultivate the land themselves. They actually need the tenants ... As for the tenants who are threatened with cancellation of leases, they will get alternative land, according to official statements. I do not know why they are making all this fuss."

CAUTIOUS LIBERALS: The Liberal Party's reaction to the debacle was low-key. The law is fine, but its implementation could wait for a year, according to Party leader Mustafa Kamel Murad. "It is necesssary to examine the social conditions of the tenants and provide them with alternative lands ... The law has very serious ramifications, which should be taken into account and which require the holding of a broad national dialogue between the government and the opposition," Murad said.

Fayoum sign?

Last month at Abu Nassar, a tiny, remote, village in Fayoum Governorate, a fierce confrontation over eviction procedures broke out between a wealthy landlord family and impoverished tenant farmers, leaving four people dead and dozens wounded.

The battle was sparked off, according to eyewitnesses, after some boisterous members of the landowning Azzam family celebrated the eviction of 34 tenant farmers from a small plot of land by firing live bullets in the air around the area. They accidentally hit and seriously wounded 28-year-old Abdel-Hadi Rashid and his 17-year-old sister, Afaf.

A group of outraged tenant farmers retaliated by using stones, sticks and hoes against the gun-happy Azzams. During the ensuing melee, Sayed Abdel-Salam, Sarhan Abdel-Fattah and Mansour Mohamed — all of the Azzam family — were killed. Abdel-Hadi Rashid, who had been critically wounded, later died in hospital.

At the police headquarters in Fayoum, police officer Mohamed Shaalan assured *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the police had tried well in advance to negotiate a peaceful transition to avert potential problems. "We asked the tenant farmers not to interfere with the legal eviction procedures and they agreed," said Shaalan, "What happened afterwards was caused by the Azzams' provocative behaviour — by shooting around they provoked and terrorised the farmers," he added.

Back in Abu Nassar, Abdel-Hadi's family mourned the death of their son. "I don't know why my son died", his bereaved mother told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "We never even rented land from the Azzams. On that fateful day my son and daughter were just on their way home from a hard day's work in the fields. Now my son is gone. The Azzam family is rich and lives in Cairo, why do they bother to snatch two *feddans* from 34 poor families, whose entire livelihood depends on the land?," she asked.

Mohamed Rashid, the deceased's father, described conditions in Abu Nassar. A proud man, Rashid spoke impassionately. "When big shots talk about 'the poorest of the poor' they really mean us. There are about 1,000 villagers living here and we have nothing." Rashid's one-room dwelling, housing a family of seven, had no running water. "We have one water tap for the entire village", said Rashid, "and more often than not, it doesn't work. We often have to use the polluted canal water — even for cooking and drinking. There is no hospital, so we have to go to the nearest clinic in Tamia — some 30km away."

As in many other impoverished Egyptian villages, working the land in Abu Nassar still relies exclusively on labour-intensive methods of production. The villagers have no tractors, no machinery, no equipment other than a few buffaloes, their hoes and bare hands. The harsh labour and living conditions etched on people's faces belie the apparent richness of the surrounding lush green fields.

Although the village has a small elementary school, it has no health unit, no pharmacy and no shops. Residents survive on a barter system of sorts. "We have no cash to speak of," explained Abdel-Rahman Misbah, Abdel-Hadi's uncle. "The average annual income ranges between LE300 and 400. We occasionally buy supplies in the next village and survive on what the land produces, bartering according to need. We definitely live below the poverty line. I don't know what will happen to us when the new law governing agrarian relations comes into effect and rent prices skyrocket."

The nitty gritty

The law

The Landlord-Tenant Relationship Law 96 was passed on 28 June 1992. It raised the land rents from 7 to 22 times the level of land tax immediately. The law stipulated a five-year transitional period ending in October 1997, after which land rents will be determined by the unhindered forces of supply and demand and tenants could be evicted by the landlords.

The disaffected

The total area covered by land leases is, according to Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali, 16 per cent of the total arable land of nearly seven million feddans. Opposition figures are much higher. The total number of people dependent for their living on tilling rented land is about six million, according to Cooperative statistics.

What price land?

The price of a feddan of quality agricultural land close to the Nile's banks is about LE50,000. The average rent for such a feddan is currently about LE800 per year. Economists believe this rent could more than triple once the law is fully implemented next October.

Ominous signs?

In February, 17 farmers were wounded in Dessouq, in the Delta Governorate of El-Gharbiya, when fighting erupted during the handover of sold land from one landlord to another.

In March, police had to use tear gas to quell land-related disturbances in El-Daqahliya, also a Delta governorate. Ninety people were arrested.

In the same month, 3,000 farmers took to the streets in the Upper Egyptian Governorate of Beni Suef, blocking the Cairo-Assiut highway, when they were refused cooperative loans because their leases would run out in October.

In April, four were killed in a land-related quarrel in Fayoum (see "Fayoum sign?").



Reported by:
Faiza Rady, Gamal Essam El-Din, Mona El-Nahhas & Fatemah Farag

Mummies' secrets on display

This summer, travellers to Luxor will be treated to the world's first-ever museum on mummification. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** saw the display









The newly-restored 'solar' court at Luxor Temple (above) and the Mummification Centre on the bank of the Nile are two new attractions at Luxor. Among the displays of the latter are a wooden box for 'scwepte' figures (right), a mummified fish and a beautifully wrapped mummified cat.

Ending years of debate over a controversial plan to turn Luxor's Visitors Centre into a museum, President Hosni Mubarak inaugurated, last week, Egypt's and the world's first ever Museum of Mummification.

The Visitors Centre was originally designed to regulate and control the number of visitors to the West Bank but was converted, in less than a year, into a museum presenting the full saga of how mummification was carried out thousands of years ago.

Entering the dimly-lit mummification museum is like being introduced into a holy shrine. In fact, there was no more sacred ritual in the history of Ancient Egypt than that of the preservation of the corpse of the deceased in order that he or she may live again in the after-life.

According to Nasri Eskander, the project manager, the museum is "the first of its kind in the whole world. The mummification process has always been a mystery and this museum sheds light on this vitally important ritual that was such a salient feature of Ancient Egyptian culture."

The museum displays the instruments and materials used in the process of mummification, statues of the gods associated with the ritual and, of course, a number of mummies.

One section, the "ten-paintings corner", presents modern paintings illustrating the stages of mummification, starting from the opening of the abdomen to remove the viscera to the drying out of the corpse with salts. "Some scenes have been taken from wall representations at Saqqara. Also depicted are the rituals associated with rebirth, among which is 'the opening of the mouth' ceremony which was carried out only by the high priest," Mohamed El-Saghir, head of the Upper Egypt Antiquities Department told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. In the main hall of the museum, mummies of humans and animals as well as five beautifully painted sarcophagi dating from the reign of Amenhotep III (about 1580 BC), are on display. The mummies include the mummy of an anonymous queen found in the Tomb of Amenhotep II and one from the Tomb of Seti I. There are also mummies of a fish found in Esna; of a newly-born crocodile, the sacred animal representing the god Sobek; and a mummy of an ibis from Tuna El-Gabal. The mummy of a goose and the leg of a goat wrapped in linen are also on view, as well as a coffin containing the mummy of a cat, the sacred animal representing the goddess Bastet, whose cult became very popular during the Late Period (1085-525 BC). According to Eskander, these were among the offerings usually placed in tombs.

Also on display is a mummified ram covered with a gilded mask made of layers of linen or papyrus glued together and shaped into the features of the ram.

One showcase is devoted to four alabaster canopic jars belonging to Wahibre-Menneferu, son of King Psamtic, found at Deir El-Bahri in Upper Egypt. Another, contains some of the materials used in the mummification process such as natron (sodium hydroxide) from Wadi Natrun, the oldest salt quarry in Egypt, and sawdust which was used as temporary stuffing.

Three showcases devoted to the tools used in the mummification process contain scissors, a knife and the brush used to clean the dried debris and to reconstitute the corpse after the internal organs were taken out.

The entrance fee for the museum is $10 and public access will begin this week.

'Something of a miracle' in Luxor

Luxor Temple, once a backdrop for the great Opet festival, when the sacred barges of the god Amun were taken in procession from Karnak to Luxor at the height of the annual Nile flood, was the scene of a modern musical gala last week. The event, attended by President Hosni Mubarak and Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, was to celebrate the opening of Amenhotep's solar court, a structure regarded as representing the peak of creativity of this pharaoh's reign. It has taken three years of restoration work to prepare the site for the public, including the dismantling and reinstallation of 24 colossal columns — work described by Farouk Hosni as "something of a miracle."

The project of restoring and consolidating these columns dates back to 1987, when the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) detected erosion, acute cracks and the tilting of the columns of the court.

"The capitals on top of the columns were also tilting dangerously," said Ali Hassan, head of the SCA. The endangered columns were mainly on the eastern side of the court. "Twenty-one are on the east side and two are on the west," Hassan said.

A rise in the underground water level is the root cause of the problem. The water had damaged the columns' foundations and also caused the outer layers to fall off.

The project had caused a certain degree of controversy, with many archaeologists claiming that the materials used in restoration would damage the monument. But antiquities officials, confident that their methods were safe, went ahead with the dismantling and reinstalling of the columns.

Damaged parts were replaced by stones extracted from the Gabal Al-Silsila mountains, north of Aswan, the source of the original stone of the temple. To reinforce the soil and protect the monument from further adverse effects of underground water, a 'dewatering' project was designed, relying on underground suction through a deep-well system. This element of the project also faced opposition, on the grounds that the system could weaken adjacent structures, even causing them to collapse.

The opening of the restored court is part of a larger scheme to restore Luxor's existing archaeological sites, on the one hand, and to open up new sites on the other, to relieve the pressure of the expected tourist influx after the summer.

The president's visit to the city also gave a boost to a UNESCO-sponsored development plan to revamp the city of Luxor. According to Maj-Gen Mohamed Youssef, head of the City Council, the president has approved a plan to introduce lighting to the West Bank and to allow evening visits to the tombs. "The idea for this project, financed by donations from China, France and Italy is being carefully studied," Youssef said.

Antiquities officials have revealed that more royal tombs will be open to the public this summer. According to Youssef, the new openings are "part of the promotion and marketing" for the grand climax of the Luxor revitalisation project — the staging of *Aida* in November.

Horsing around in Sharqiya

Visiting a horse festival in the Nile Delta is an extraordinary experience as **Rehab Saad** *discovered when she spent a day in the Sharqiya Governorate for the International Horse Festival*







Trotting their stuff: Arab horses dance, prance, and impress. Al-Sharqiya breeders will sell you one of these for LE10,000 to LE50,000 — *photos: Khaled El-Fiqi*

The trip from Cairo to Bilbeis, where the International Horse Festival was held at the beginning of May, took just an hour. As we neared the town, 60km north-east of the capital, an area decorated with red carpets, flags, balloons and patchwork tents came into sight. The festival, organised by the Sharqiya Governorate and the Egyptian Tourist Authority, was under way — for the sixth year running.

Hundreds of people of different nationalities, professions and ages gathered in the stands, some enjoying a family day out, others clearly in the business of buying and selling Arab horses.

Events ranged from a competition for the best dancing horse to the *baladi mezmar* reed flute concerts, from polo matches to acrobats on horseback.

The atmosphere of excitement was overwhelming, especially during a closely-fought polo match between Smouha of Alexandria and the Police Federation team, the eventual winners.

"This is the first time I have attended such a festival in Egypt and I came especially to see the Arab horses," said Franzini Julio Cesar, the ambassador of Uruguay. "In my country we have some imported Arab horses and stage similar festivals. We also have wild horse (rodeo) festivals where the riders have to control the horse."

For Hector Cardenas, the ambassador of Mexico, the Sharqiya festival reminded him of a Mexican tradition. "Horsemanship is one of the national sports in Mexico. Every city has its own dancing horses and we often win medals at the Olympic Games," he said.

Wealthy horse-breeders come from far afield to the Sharqiya Governorate — home to 80 per cent of the Arab horses in Egypt — to attend the festival and buy the best available steeds.

"This is an excellent opportunity for buying and selling horses," said Hassan Mustafa, one of the breeders. "All the breeders gather together. Once I see a good buy I try to finalise the deal immediately."

But good horses do not come cheap — the price of an Arab horse can range from LE10,000 to LE50,000. A race horse could set you back as much as one million dollars, the horse box alone can cost an additional LE150,000.

"The cost depends on certain characteristics," said Mustafa. "The beauty of the horse's face, the line of the neck, the grace of its body, hooves and back are important." Mares sell for more than stallions because they are expected to reproduce.

For horse-breeders, a special booth displaying medicine and equipment offered more than 100 items for the treatment and nutrition of horses. Special shampoos for the tail and mane, vitamins and creams for the horse and jockey, as well as medicines for certain irritations promised to keep valuable horses in tip-top condition.

According to Fathi Shaaban, chairman of Manabea Misr Al-Arabia, a company which produces medicine for horses, a horse is an investment. "I believe that horse races are a good investment. The income from any race covers the expenses of a horse farm and provides a good income for the jockey as well," he said.

"In the Gulf area there are numerous horse events which are held weekly. They stopped in Egypt and moved to the Gulf for some unknown reasons," he continued.

Shaaban believes that the government should encourage horse-breeders and hold frequent horses festivals and races. Something should also be done to reduce customs duties on imported horses, he added.

Although the festival is now in its sixth year, some essential facilities are still lacking. There were no toilets, and just one food outlet for snacks. There were no directions around the site and the announcements were all in Arabic.

But more seriously, the event lacks promotion. There were no advertisements in advance — officials claim that it is the job of the media to encourage people to go.

"The idea of the festival is good and should be encouraged," said Medhat Shaaban, a brother of the company chairman. "However, it should be developed further. The Sharqiya Governorate should permanently set aside about 200 feddans of land for horse breeding. On the outskirts of this area there should be motels, chalets, restaurants, cafeterias and other facilities so that families can go there for a whole weekend, to ride horses and enjoy other facilities in the area. This would turn it into a year-round attraction and would make Sharqiya a regular travel destination," he added.

Hussein Ramzy Qazem, the governor of Sharqiya, agreed that a special area should be allocated for breeding horses. "Annexed to this there could be a riding school and a club for horse lovers and people interested in this kind of sport," he said.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in *Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza*, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from *Almaza* LE28; *from the airport* LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, *then Giza and Almaza. Departs* Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets *LE35 one way.*

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and *10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for* foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets *LE279* for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http:// www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has it All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uiuc.edu/~haggag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

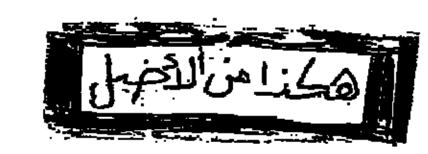
http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.

http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5a/city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CD's besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayyan.

http://watt.seas.virginia.EDU/~aoa5u is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**



The national squad

(height in cm, weight in kg)

Name: Ayman Salah
Date of Birth: 5/8/1966
Club: Zamalek
Height: 189
Weight: 98
Matches: 220
Position: Goalkeeper

Name: Mohamed Nakeeb
Date of Birth: 6/4/1974
Club: Olympic
Height: 190
Weight: 98
Matches: 130
Position: Goalkeeper

Name: Mohamed Ibrahim
Date of Birth: 23/12/1974
Club: Zamalek
Height: 170
Weight: 80
Matches: 120
Position: Goalkeeper

Name: Ahmed El-Attar
Date of Birth: 13/4/1967
Club: Zamalek
Height: 202
Weight: 104
Matches: 150
Position: Back left

Name: Gohar Nabil
Date of Birth: 31/1/1972
Club: Ahli
Height: 186
Weight: 88
Matches: 150
Position: Pivot

Name: Sameh Abdel-Wareth
Date of Birth: 3/8/1971
Club: Ahli
Height : 195
Weight: 102
Matches: 170
Position: Back right

Name: Amr El-Gioushi
Date of Birth: 1/7/1971
Club: Olympic
Height: 186
Weight: 95
Matches: 170
Position: Left wing

Name: Ashraf Awad
Date of Birth: 1/6/1972
Club: Ahli
Height: 194
Weight: 93
Matches: 180
Position: Back left

Name: Mahmoud Hussein
Date of Birth: 27/8/1972
Club: Zamalek
Height: 189
Weight: 101
Matches: 159
Position: Back right

Name: Aser El-Kasaby
Date of Birth: 31/7/1966
Club: Sporting
Height: 181
Weight: 81
Matches: 200
Position: Pivot

Name: Ayman El-Alfy
Date of Birth: 27/9/1974
Club: Port Said
Height:180
Weight: 88
Matches: 70
Position: Wing right

Name: Marwan Ragab
Date of Birth: 3/8/1974
Club: Sporting
Height: 185
Weight: 96
Matches: 100
Position: Midfielder

Name: Sherif Mo'men
Date of Birth: 29/4/1979
Club: Tayaran
Height: 185
Weight: 96
Matches: 70
Position: Wing right

Name: Magdy Abul-Magd
Date of Birth: 15/10/1972
Club: Zamalek
Height: 180
Weight: 82
Matches: 100
Position: Pivot

Name: Hazem Awad
Date of Birth: 22/11/1973
Club: Ahli
Height: 182
Weight: 85
Matches: 60
Position: Wing left

Name: Ahmed Belal
Date of Birth: 12/3/1968
Club: Olympic
Height: 190
Weight: 90
Matches: 180
Position: Midfielder



Focus Kumamoto

The World Handball Championships open next Saturday in Kumamoto, Japan. For the Egyptian team, it is a chance to better their sixth-place performance in Iceland two years ago, Inas Mazhar reviews preparations and profiles an Egyptian star

'97 MEN'S WORLD HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The world's best 24 handball teams will converge on Kumamoto, a city with a population of 600,000 situated on Japan's southern island of Kyushu, next week, to take part in the World Handball Championships scheduled from 17 May to 1 June.

Kumamoto is Japan's handball capital. The game is wildly popular in the city, and over the last 40 years, around 90 national championship titles in the widest possible range of age categories have been held there.

The International Handball Federation (IHF) is breaking new ground in this competition. It is the first time the World Championships have been staged in Asia — the decision to hold the competition here is an acknowledgement of Asia's immense progress in the sport in the last few years.

As Asia's handball prowess has increased, so Europe's fortunes have fallen. To the amazement of many observers, some well-known teams from continental Europe — the birthplace of the sport of handball — *failed to qualify*. Germany, Austria, Denmark and Sweden will all have to watch from the sidelines.

New to the championship are two nations from southern Europe, Portugal and Italy, whose appearance is a just reward for the tremendous efforts they have made over the *last few years*.

They are joined by the young countries of Lithuania and the Czech Republic, also making their first appearance. The Lithuanians and the Czechs are not new to the game, of course. Both their countries have great handballing traditions, and their citizens appeared many times for the USSR and Czechoslovakia in the old days.

Countries from other continents will also be making their World Championship debut in Kumamoto. Saudi Arabia and China, which has already established itself as one of the leading women's teams, will be representing Asia for the first time, having made the big leap onto the World Championship stage. And Argentina, representing what the championship terms 'Pan-America', will also be making its World Championship debut.

Even if none of these new teams make it to the medal rostrum, their appearance in the championships has given handball a welcome shot in the arm. But just how far can *the non-European challenge penetrate* the phalanx of traditional European might?

In Iceland two years ago, six non-European teams made it into the last sixteen. For five of them, this was as far as they got. But Egypt went on to take sixth place, a performance it repeated at the *Olympics*.

There is again speculation about the possibility of a non-European championship medal this time around, and most of the teams from Asia, Africa and America are hoping to make the leap into the quarterfinals. Algeria, which has won the African Championships six times, Cuba, a three-time Pan-American champion and Korea, which came 12th in the 1995 World Championships, rate their chances particularly highly.

But the traditional European teams are looking pretty strong. The circle of medal contenders basically reflects the end result of the Olympic tournament in Atlanta, although the new Yugoslavia makes an interesting addition to the pack. The team, centred around sharp-shooter Nenad Perunicic, will be making its comeback in the world handball arena, and intends to notch up some more victories to add to the old Yugoslavia's Olympic victory in 1984 and World Championship title in 1986.

Olympic gold medalists Croatia have already hired another new national trainer. Silver medal winners Sweden will once again be represented in Kumamoto by their old hands, with the exception of pivot Per Carlen and left winger Erik Hajas, who are no longer in the team.

*There is no way of knowing how de*fending champions France will manage without the stars Frederic Violle, Pascal Mahe and Denis Lathoud, dropped by trainer Daniel Constantini.

Spain can be expected to make a strong showing, riding the wave of confidence prompted by the country's Olympic bronze medal success all the way to Kumamoto. And former world champions Russia will also have major ambitions in Japan, with head coach Vladimir Maximov seeking to put his team's disappointing performance in Atlanta behind them.

Kumamoto '97 looks like being a really interesting World Championship. The gap between the top teams is smaller than ever, the competition is more open than ever, and with so much riding on the teams' performance on the day, we should be prepared for surprises.

National team prepares



'97 Men's World Handball Championship in Kumamoto Japan 1997·5/17 ► 6/1

THE NATIONAL team started serious training and preparation for these championships after the Atlanta Olympic Games, including participation in several international championships abroad. They came second out of six countries in the Netherlands in November.

In December, Egypt won the Italian Open title, followed by the Swedish Four-Nations Cup title in January.

International friendly matches were played in Norway and France in February, and in April, the team played in the Al-Ahram International Championship, coming second behind Spain, the Olympic bronze medalists. The team's last match before heading for Japan last Monday was the Perci International Championship in France, where they took third place, after defeating gold medalists Croatia and drawing with the defending world champions France, *before losing to the* Czech Republic.



Out of iron and steel

For the 30-year-old, super-handball star Ahmed El-Attar — ranked sixth best in the world — handball is everything. It's not only his career, it's also his life.

El-Attar started his sporting career by playing handball in 1985 with the 'Iron and Steel' club in Helwan, a southern suburb of Cairo. Participating with his team in the league second division competition, he was noticed by Zamalek's club head coach.

A year later, in 1986, he moved to Zamalek, one of the top four handball teams in Egypt. Two years later, after becoming one of his *team's* key players, he joined Egypt's national team and shared in winning international, continental and regional titles.

El-Attar, known as the 'superman' or the 'giant' because of his height (he stands at 2.02m) and his amazing abilities, says that he discovered his skills when he was eight years old. "My friends used to *make fun* of me because I was very tall compared to them and my limbs were also very long, especially my hands and fingers. I remember once that I had a fight with one of my colleagues because he started making fun of me, and, all of a sudden I found myself fighting with the whole class," he recalls and laughs.

As he grew older, El-Attar felt his talent at handball grow. His admiration and love for the game led him to join the Helwan club and he became one of its essential members.

But the gentle giant also worried if other people suffered because of the strength of his game. "In the beginning *I used to stay awake* all night, worrying I had injured a goalkeeper. I will never forget that day in France in 1992 when I was playing among the world-selection team versus France. We were warming up before the match and I was shooting towards the empty net when suddenly my ball hit the pole and bounced back. It hit a young boy on the head and knocked him unconscious," he said.

El-Attar, along with team-mate Ahmed Belal, led Egypt to the international level and to a place among the top handball nations. He is the only Egyptian player to join the world-selection team in 1992, 1993, 1995, and was selected as one of the best-seven in the World Cup in Sweden in 1996.

El-Attar, the youngest of six children, has received several offers to turn professional for any of the prestigious European clubs. However, under the Egyptian Handball Federation rules, national team stars are not allowed to *turn pro abroad*.

"My dream was, and is, to play abroad, especially in France, Spain or Sweden. I have been promised by the officials of my federation that I will be allowed to accept any offers after the World Championship in Japan, and I hope by then I could receive good offers," he said.

However, El-Attar has another dream: to garner, with his team, a World Championship medal or an Olympic medal before he retires.

The newly-married star, who is also a father-to-be, said that his love and dedication to handball makes him willing to encourage his son or daughter to follow him into the handball *courts*.

Group schedule

Group A:
YUG Yugoslavia
ALG Algeria
KSA Saudi Arabia
JPN Japan
ISL Iceland
LTU Lithuania

Group B:
FRA France
SWE Sweden
NOR Norway
ITA Italy
ARG Argentina
KOR Korea

Group C:
ESP Spain
CZE Czech Rep.
POR Portugal
TUN Tunisia
EGY Egypt
BRA Brazil

Group D:
RUS Russia
CRO Croatia
HUN Hungary
CUB Cuba
CHN China
MAR Morocco

Egypt in world handball

1964 — Egypt was the first non-European country to participate in the World Handball Championships in Czechoslovakia. At that time Egypt was the only African or Asian country where the game was popular. The team included Hussein El-Shafei, Taha El-Shafei, Ahmed Nabil Ahmeddin, Mustafa Hassan, Mahmoud Hassan, Hussein Mursi, Farid Hagag and Mokhtar Tabouzada, the goalkeeper. The coach was Mounir Girges.

1992 — The national team, with some of the current players, took part in the men's B World Championships in Austria, with a team including Ahmed El-Attar, Ahmed Belal, Ayman Salah, Hossam Gharib, Yasser Labib, Ahmed De'bis and *Sameh Abdel-Wareth*, coached by the German coach Paul Tedman with Assem El-Sadani.

1993 — The 12th World Championships in Sweden. *The Egyptian team*, coached by Assem El-Sadani, and with more or less the same players as today, took 12th place.

1995 — This year witnessed the team's rise to world prominence, as they fought hard to achieve sixth place in the World Championships in Iceland. The team's line-up was more or less the same as in the previous championship, with Hossam Gharib the only absentee. Karim Mourad had trained the team for a year and a half before the championship, and then German Olrich Viller, assisted by Mohamed Abdel-Moeti, took over last-minute preparations three months before the championship.

1996 — Egypt took fourth place in the World *Championships in Sweden*. The team was coached by the current national team trainer, the Spaniard Javier Cuesta, and Assem El-Sadani.

Championship greats

Sweden is the nation with most World Championship experience. Indeed, it is the only country to have taken part in all 14 World Championships, where it has played 85 games, winning 57 and losing 27. One game ended in a draw.

Sweden's Mats Olsson could become the most experienced World Championship player in Kumamoto, where he will be appearing in his sixth such tournament. So far he has had to share the top position with the Hungarian Peter Kovacs.

The most successful World Championship player of all time is the Romanian pivot Cornel Otelea, who became a Men's World Champion three times, in 1961, 1964 and 1970. At the 1967 World Championships he won the bronze medal.

The highest number of spectators at a World Championship final was recorded in Prague in 1967, where 18,000 fans saw Romania beat Sweden 25-22.

The record for the number of goals scored in a World Championship tournament is held by the Korean Kyung-Shin Yoon, who hit *the target 86 times in 1995.*





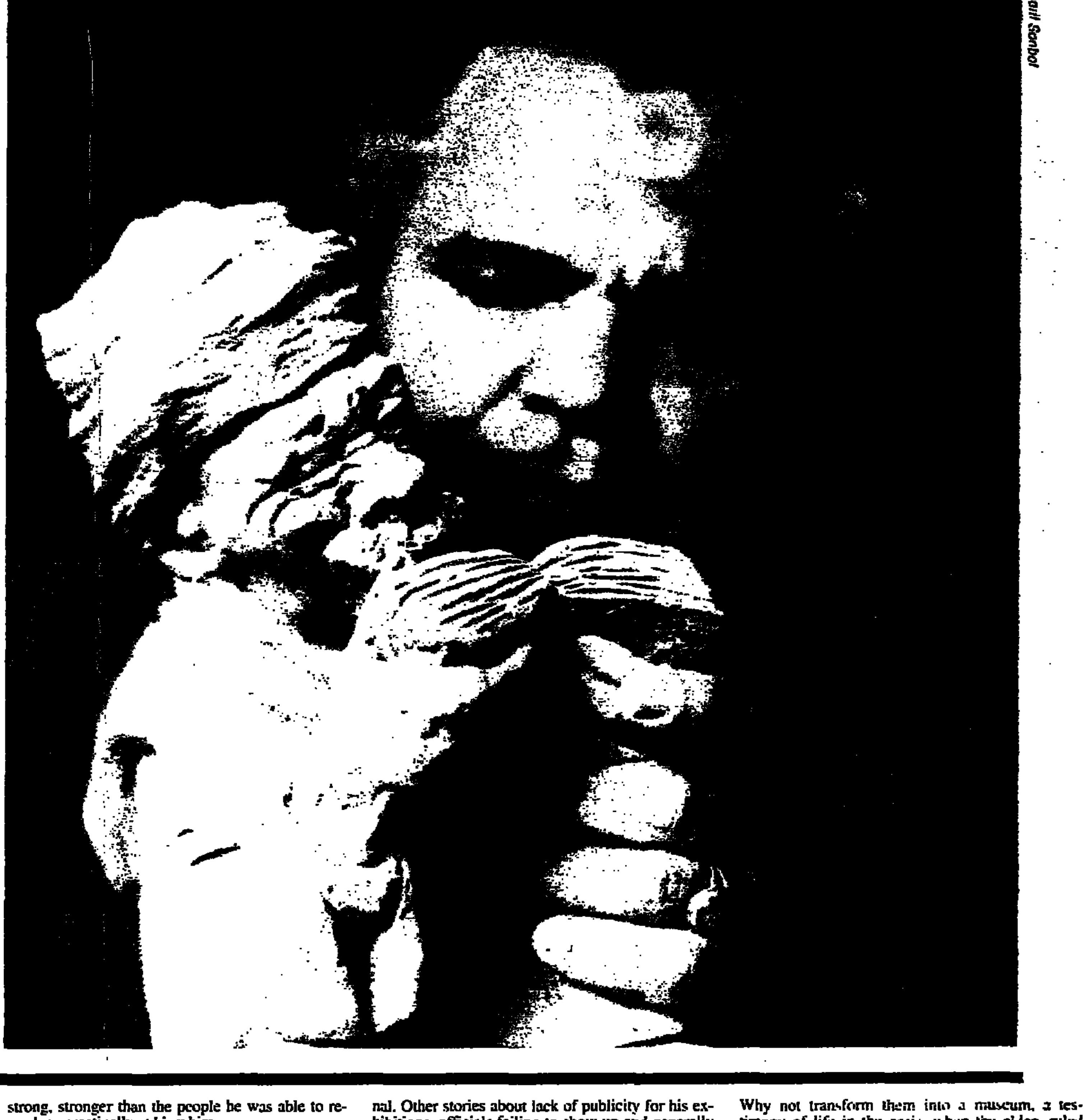


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Mabrouk: Figures of speech

He won't explain: they speak for themselves. And after all, what else is family for?

Meeting Mabrouk, the sculptor from Kharga Oasis, the first thing that springs to mind is the question "when does a *naïf* artist stop being naïve?" And the answer is bound to be: when he can describe himself objectively as such. Mabrouk, when he tells the whole story, confides that he discovered his art while napping in Pharaonic temples; but he peppers more official conversations with the term, perhaps aware of its appeal to a public forever hungry for local colour. It is abundantly clear that he considers — or has been told by more commercially-minded associates — that his work is characteristic of a particular time and place.

But Mabrouk is reluctant to "explain" the statues of the village barber or the old men reading the Qur'an; he will only give names. If you don't understand them, he insists, he can't explain. The statues speak for themselves. This is his uncle, the other one, over there, *is his cousin's maternal* grandmother. If his renditions of his friends and relatives are pounced upon by visitors eager to capture the essential quality of a timeless Egypt, that is not really his problem: but, if his work is to be seen as tourist material, in an area where abundance comes mainly through the appreciation of foreign visitors, he feels that somehow luck has passed him by, or, more accurately, that he did not recognise it when it knocked on his door.

"There was this man in Los Angeles," he says, "who wanted to create an oasis, a copy of the old Kharga and its mud huts, right there in Los Angeles. He wanted me to stay in this make-believe oasis and sculpt my statues for the visitors. Thousands of them. 'You will be a multi-millionaire Mabrouk,' he told me; 'you will have so much money you will not know what to do with it; I'll get you the green card and make you into a new American Picasso:' but as you know, I am an uneducated, naïve artist. What would I do in Los Angeles?

"I was scared. I preferred to stay in my country, I told him. I told him he could keep his oasis. I needed *Umm Mabrouk [his blind mother]*, the nasty *Umda* and the poor *fellahin*, the children who bathe in the springs and the village idiot. I needed to see their dear faces in front of my eyes to be able to breathe and practice my art." Mabrouk laughs. Los Angeles, just like his reply, is a bit of a joke to him.

But, he says, his own country does not appreciate him. At almost sixty, his reputation is solid at home and abroad, but it is by no stretch of the imagination widespread and he has not ammassed the fortunes which he has seen other, less gifted, artists achieve. Why? wonders Mabrouk, who feels betrayed.

It all started like a fairy tale, with the little boy crawling into the dark temples to escape the searing noon sun and falling asleep hugging the form of some statue half buried in the sand. He would wake up a little later and his fingers would caress the forms that he found, scratching lightly on the *ground. Later, he felt the need to reproduce the* shapes his fingers had become familiar with.

"I stole the stones which held the doors in our village ajar and began to carve them into shapes. My father, seeing what I was doing, told me it was the work of *Ibliss*, the devil. He used to call me *Ibliss*."

Mabrouk was not deterred, however, and under his nimble fingers the stones acquired faces almost of their own accord. He recognised the barber, and the watchman, the fat son of the *Umda*, the *Sheikh El-Balad* and the Qur'an teacher at the *kuttab*. Had he really meant to reproduce these people? Where did his skill come from? At first he was not sure, and sometimes it scared him; he felt the statues were coming alive and were looking at him. Mainly, however, his power elated him. "I used to speak to them, sometimes lovingly and sometimes rudely. I told them the things I would have loved to tell them in real life but never dared. Once I sculpted my father, then I beat him as cruelly as he had beaten me for carving human shapes."

Mabrouk did not believe in the *Ibliss* story, but went through violent changes of mood, sometimes *frightened* by his work but more often feeling strong, stronger than the people he was able to reproduce practically at his whim.

Then one day, the village teacher asked him to sculpt a statue for an art competition in which the school was participating. He won first prize. "The competition was at the Continental Hotel. I had come in my *galabiya* and of course I did not attend. Someone came to get me and asked if I could find a pair of trousers. I couldn't, so I went as I was. The great artist Bikar had been there. By the time I arrived at the hotel he was gone, but they told me that I should bring more work, that he would organise an exhibition for me. I did not have to go far. I had brought all my work with me."

On the morning of the exhibition, Mabrouk was crouching in a corner of the room, watching over his statues. "The great professor Bikar entered and spotted me. I was still wearing my *galabiya*, of *course. He asked where the artist was. I told him* that he had stepped out for a moment, but could I be of service? Well, I told him about all the statues, claiming all the time that I was the caretaker, but when we arrived in front of the statue of my blind mother, he stopped. 'Who is this?' asked Bikar. I couldn't lie. 'It is Mabrouk's blind mother,' I told him. 'Her eyes are blind but her heart can see, and she is wishing her son Mabrouk well.' Bikar looked at me. 'You are Mabrouk,' he said.

Professor Bikar embraced me and told me about the future I would have as a true Egyptian artist. He has been my friend ever since that day. Although he can see with his eyes, Bikar also has the gift of seeing with his heart."

From that day on, Mabrouk's fortunes were mixed. There is the story of the statue commissioned for the Suez Canal that graces not the mouth of the famous waterway, but the house of a German tourist. Mabrouk blames "those people", whom he does not want to name, for the unglorious fate of his masterpiece. They decided that only a statue sculpted by the recipient of many international awards deserved to salute the ships crossing the Canal. Other stories about lack of publicity for his exhibitions, officials failing to show up and generally a great lack of consideration for what he considers genuine Egyptian art are told in his slightly mocking, slightly sad, hushed tones. But one thing is certain. Mabrouk has accumulated few honours and no fortune in all those years spent turning the oasis mud into arresting figurines.

For almost forty years, each time he comes to Cairo, he stays at the same small hotel in Clot Bey. He has done so ever since, as a youngster, he came to Cairo for the first time, riding in the back of the truck bearing the carefully wrapped statuettes he had made out of the clay of Kharga for the exhibition at the Continental Hotel in Ezbekieh.

Clot Bey is not the kind of area where one would expect to find many artists of renown today, although its history and distinctive character in fact *lend themselves admirably to inspiration. Possibly* its old reputation as the red-light district of Cairo lingers, and few would willingly admit that they are guests in the now deserted sordid little hotels. Not Mabrouk, however, who stresses that he is an habitué of the area.

He is here for yet another exhibition, but it is a rather disillusioned artist who flips through an envelope of photos to show his favourites. He still has a dream, though, and talking about it, the naïve misfit from the oasis suddenly gives way to an urban planner whose memories unfold under his fingertips.

"There is the old village," he says, "where the traditional mud brick houses are, now deserted. The young generation prefers to live in concrete candy boxes. So be it. We were all fooled by the drive towards modernisation. My own wife, when I asked for her hand in marriage, insisted she would only marry me if I took her to live in one of the candy boxes. Now she can fully enjoy the one-room apartment that we share with our eight children. Ten to a room, this is how we live!"

But, *says Mabrouk, the old houses are still there.* Why not transform them into a museum, a testimony of life in the oasis, when the elders ruled and every son brought his bride to his father's large house? He wants to restore the houses and place his statues in them, dressed in the traditional clothes of the oasis.

"I will revive the old village," he says, suddenly excited. "In this corner, I would place *Amm* Sayed the barber," he decides, pointing at a spot just beyond the window. "He will be holding his large razor, and maybe I will give him a customer. There, I will have the oven in which *Umm* Bekhit used to bake the bread, and in this house, over there, I could have a few young girls peeking out of the narrow window. I will restore the winding, shady alleys, the low doors and tether a couple of donkeys, here and there;" he pauses, contemplating his vision wistfully.

"*The voices*," he continues suddenly; "it is essential that we record the voices of the people. We should not lose our dialect. It is special, you can only hear it in the oases." Mabrouk is fascinated by the difference between the dialect of the old people and the speech which has resulted from national homogenisation. "The young generation can't speak it and the girls refuse to wear the *tawb*," he says with deep regret. "They are moving away from their roots."

By creating the museum, Mabrouk hopes that he can also help the inhabitants of the oasis regain their pride and bring much-needed prosperity to the area, which will be able to boast, he says, "a unique museum, which tourists from all over the world will want to visit."

Sitting there, in the large shady room, Mabrouk smiles for a moment. His hands move over an imaginary figurine, and all around him, released from the cardboard boxes stuffed with leaves and straw, his friends and family sit — motionless for now.

Profile by ***Fayza Hassan***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Having spent a pretty penny or two on constructing a summer wardrobe entirely of chiffon, not to mention the crucial underpinnings of these not-for-the-faint-hearted items, all I needed was a chance to parade in my new tid-bits, announcing that the summer season had been officially opened by yours truly. And where could I find a better launching pad than at the panel discussion and dinner of the AUC Alumni Association? So dears, don't forget to admire my unique little "queen of the flies" ensemble next Sunday, before you concentrate on what '83 alumnus **Gamal Mubarak**, member of the US-Egyptian Presidential Council, has to say. His speech is entitled *21st Century Egypt at the crossroads; challenges and potentialities. What does the future hold for young graduates in the rapidly changing Egypt of today?* I hope it is as much fun for you as it was for those of us who graduated... well, not so long ago.



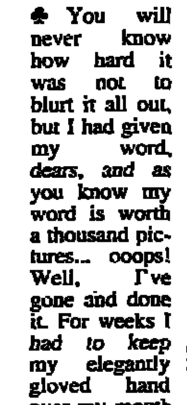
Gamal Mubarak



Farouk Hosni

♣ As you well know dears I cannot keep away from *cultural* manifestations. As soon as I hear of a new exhibition, a conference on arts or a festival, I forget my nearest and dearest and live only in anticipation of the happy event. Imagine my excitement when I found out that Culture Minister **Farouk Hosni** will be opening the Third National Film Festival at the Opera House next week. I really did *pester* **Samir Gharib**, the director of the festival, for my invitation. Finally it arrived in the mail today and now I can rest in peace until the 18th.

♦ I don't know if my good friend **Soheir Ghanem**, features writer in *Al-Ahram*'s Foreign Affairs section, has been having fun, but she certainly has been busy giving her time and attention to the eradication of illiteracy. Now Soheir has made a daring foray into local politics, and has been elected the youngest member to the Shubra El-Kheima local council. Incidentally, **Soheir** also happens to be the youngest member ever elected to a local council.



Soheir Ghanem

♣ You will never know how hard it was not to blurt it all out, but I had given my word, *dears, and as* you know my word is worth a thousand pictures... ooops! Well, I've gone and done it. For weeks I *had to keep* my elegantly gloved hand over my mouth lest I put my foot in it. Anyway, it is over now, and the cat is out of the bag, or at least **Claudia Schiffer** has leaped onto the catwalk at the Pyramids' Sound and Light site where, together with the rich and the richer, several centuries of history (the rumour has it that *le petit caporal* did exaggerate a bit) had the opportunity to contemplate her for one magic night. Even in that short time, there was a great deal of contemplation taking place, and gaping too, what with **Claudia**, and twenty other models, coiffed by **Mohamed El-Soghayar** and clad in unbelievable little numbers signed **Moschino**. **Stephanelli**, **Azzaro** and **Tomaso** dancing their way through one of the most extraordinary fashion shows of the year. Fortunately, I always have my wits about me, even in the most exciting circumstance and had brought my colour-coordinated lap-top in my evening bag. Quite handy, I found, to jot down *the numbers* of the charming *little* fineries I am treating myself to. I am sure you are dying to know which side of the catwalk I was on dears. Though solicited by the organisers, I decided that it was unwise to compete with the world-ranking supermodel, especially as a few cups of chocolate for breakfast have *made their* unwelcome appearance around my waistline; of course that does not stop me from competing with darling Claudia on different turf and, as she was telling me last week in Cannes, on the terrace of the Carlton, my part in *Blinding Light* is bigger than hers in *The Blackout*, and I may *be the one finally* walking off with the gold feather.

r to l: Claudia Schiffer, Matthew Modine and Beatrice Dalle at Cannes

